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SUICIDE SQUADRON



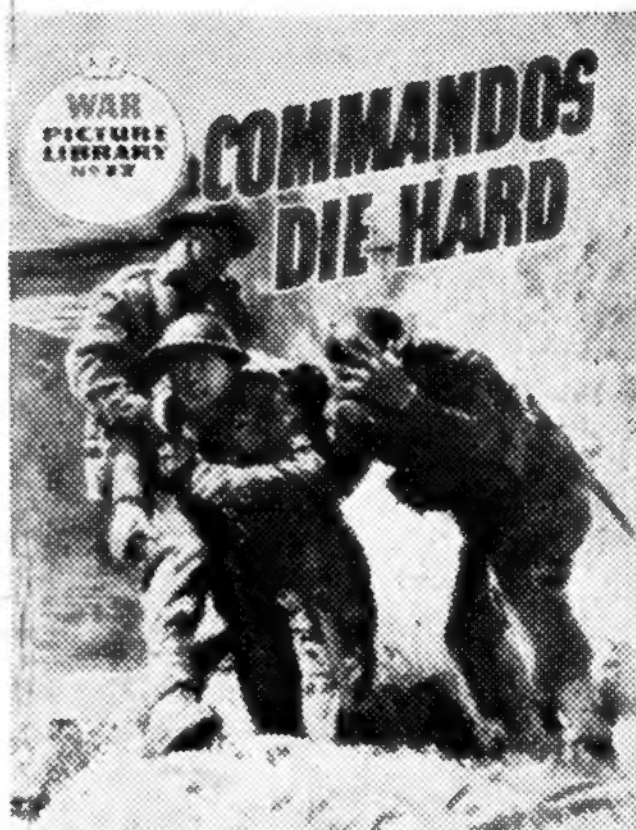
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SUICIDE SQUADRON

1940 - THE DARKEST YET FINEST HOUR IN BRITAIN'S FIGHTING HISTORY. FRANCE HAD COLLAPSED. DUNKIRK HAD WROUGHT ITS MIRACLE. HITLER'S INVASION HAD POISED AND THEN RECOILED AT THE CRIPPLING LOSSES OF HIS LUFTWAFFE AT THE HANDS OF THE GALLANT FEW. THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN HAD BEEN WON - BUT AT A PRICE.



Chapter 1. **YANKEE VOLUNTEERS**

IN THE SPRING OF 1941 A BOAT CREPT INTO BLITZED LIVERPOOL. ON HER DECK, GAPIING AT THEIR FIRST SIGHT OF TOTAL WARFARE, STOOD A MIXED BUNCH OF YOUNG AMERICANS — LAWYERS, SALESMEN, SODA-JERKS, COWBOYS AND EVEN A HALF-BREED INDIAN. ONE THING THEY HAD IN COMMON — THEY COULD FLY. AND THEY KNEW ENGLAND NEEDED FLYERS.



Suicide Squadron

3

MANY AMERICANS WERE ALREADY SERVING WITH DISTINCTION IN BRITAIN'S R. A. F. ONE OF THEM WAS WASHINGTON-BORN FLIGHT LIEUTENANT SAM BASKI, WHO NOW CAST A FATHERLY EYE OVER HIS COUNTRY'S LATEST VOLUNTEERS.

WELCOME, FELLAS, TO A.F.T.S. - ADVANCED FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL TO YOU / MY JOB IS TO INDOCTRINATE YOU INTO THE R.A.F., TO TRAIN YOU TO FLY SPITFIRES, AND SHOOT THE PANTS OFF THE ENEMY BEFORE HE SHOTS OFF YOURS.



A COUPLE OF WEEKS HARD GOING WITH THIS GAILY UNDISCIPLINED BUNCH TOLD SAM HE WOULD HAVE AN EASIER TIME ON OPERATIONAL DUTY THAN TRAINING THESE WILD PILOTS.

WHEE-OW!

THESE MONKEYS MIGHT MAKE GOOD FIGHTERS BUT THEY'LL NEVER KNOW A COMMAND FROM A COCA-COLA. THEY'LL BREAK THEIR NECKS BEFORE THE ENEMY DOES IT FOR THEM.



Suicide Squadron



HAWKHURST AERODROME:

DISAPPOINTED THAT SAM WAS MADE ONLY A FLIGHT COMMANDER AND NOT THEIR LEADER, THE AMERICANS AWAITED THEIR NEW C.O. WITH LOUD MISGIVINGS. HE WAS GOING TO BE A LIMEY—AN ENGLISHMAN—NOT AT ALL A POPULAR IDEA.

PIPE DOWN, WILL YOU. GIVE THE GUY A BREAK!

THERE HE IS NOW / LET'S GIVE HIM THE RAZZ!

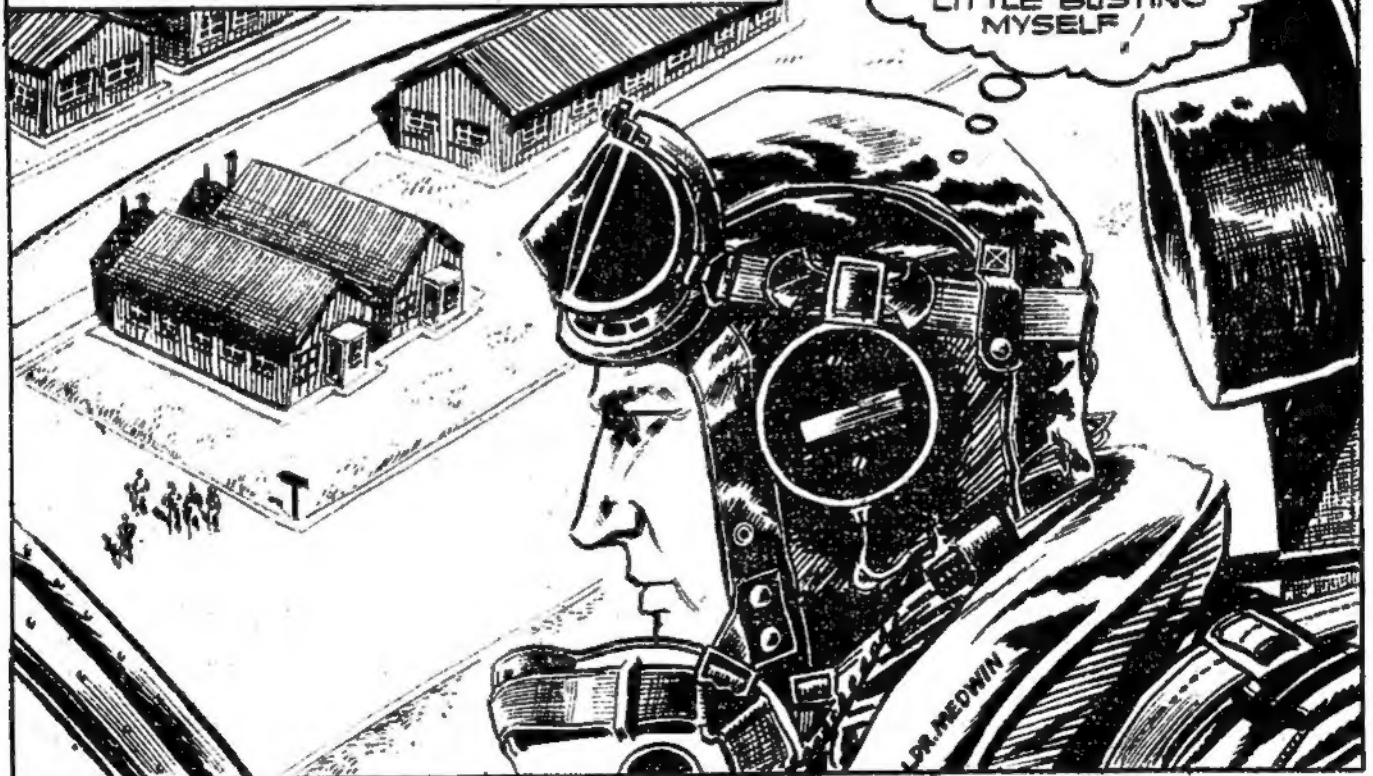
NO LIMEY'S GOING TO GIVE ME ORDERS!

A FLIGHT



IF THE AMERICANS HAD MISGIVINGS, SO HAD THEIR APPOINTED LEADER, SQUADRON LEADER JOHNNIE MEDWIN, D.F.C., WHO DEFTLY SWUNG HIS SPITFIRE INTO A CIRCUIT AND STUDIED HIS NEW HOME.

THEY SAY I'M IN FOR A TOUGH TIME WITH THESE BRONCO BUSTERS. MAYBE I'LL HAVE TO DO A LITTLE BUSTING MYSELF!



Suicide Squadron

BOB SCREIBER, BROUGHT IN TO COMMAND "B" FLIGHT, HAD SHARED SAM'S R. A. F. EXPERIENCE BUT NOT HIS MORE LENIENT VIEW OF ENGLISHMEN.

WE
DON'T WANT
ANY LIMEY
RUNNING US.
WE CAN RUN
OURSELVES.

NOT
A BAD
TOUCH
DOWN.

COULDN'T
DO BETTER
MYSELF,
BUSTER.



BRED ON SERVICE DISCIPLINE, JOHNNIE'S FIRST ACTION ON LANDING WAS TO REPORT TO THE DUTY CONTROL OFFICER AND THEN TO HIS STATION C.O. - WING COMMANDER HASKINS WHO TRIED TO BE ENCOURAGING.

YOU'LL FIND THESE AMERICANS
RATHER A WILD LOT, BUT THERE'S
SOMETHING VERY LIKEABLE
ABOUT THEM.

I HOPE
YOU'RE RIGHT, SIR.
I CAN'T SAY I
RELISH THE
FUTURE BUT I'LL
DO MY BEST.



YOU MAY HAVE TO OVERCOME
SOME RESENTMENT THAT SAM
BASKI WAS NOT MADE THEIR
LEADER. STRANGELY ENOUGH
YOU WILL FIND SAM YOUR
BEST ALLY.



THAT NIGHT THE FIRST MEETING IN THE MESS WAS A TRICKY ONE FOR ALL.

THIS IS SAM BASKI - COMMANDER OF 'A' FLIGHT.

GLAD TO HAVE YOU WITH US, SIR. HOPE YOU'RE GOING TO LIKE US.

AND I HOPE YOU'RE GOING TO LIKE ME.

BOB SCREIBER'S LOOK WAS COOL. HIS AMBITION WAS FOR AN ALL-AMERICAN SQUADRON SO THAT IT COULD EARN AN ALL-AMERICAN SUCCESS STORY IN HIS WEALTHY FATHER'S BALTIMORE NEWSPAPER, BUT AN R.A.F. SQUADRON LEADER SPOILED THAT IDEA.

... AND THIS IS BOB SCREIBER WHO WILL COMMAND 'B' FLIGHT.

HOW ARE YOU?

OKAY, THANKS!

JOHNNIE MET EACH AMERICAN IN TURN AND THEN WITH SOME RELIEF FOUND OLD FRIENDS AMONGST THE "GROUND JOBS!"



FOR ALL HIS APPARENT GAIETY, JOHNNIE WAS WORRIED. HE WAS NO PRUDE, BUT THE SLOPPY APPEARANCE OF THE AMERICANS MADE HIM UNEASY.



THE NEXT MORNING, JOHNNIE WAS VERY MUCH THE SQUADRON COMMANDER. FIRST HE HAD TAKEN A LOOK AT SAM'S "A" FLIGHT DISPERSAL AND NOW HE WAS GOING TO DO THE SAME WITH BOB SCREIBER'S "B" FLIGHT.



JOHNNIE WALKED IN AND STARED WITH RISING ANGER. SCREIBER WAS NOT THERE, AND NO ONE TOOK THE TROUBLE TO STAND - A COURTESY EXPECTED BY ANY SQUADRON COMMANDER.





THE FLIGHT ROSE AND EYED EACH OTHER INSCRUTABLY. BUCK GEARY, EX-NEW YORK CAB DRIVER, MUTTERED UNDER HIS BREATH TO SLIM BOSEY, EX-COWBOY.



IT TOOK THE AMERICANS LESS THAN A WEEK TO LOATHE JOHNNIE'S HIDE AND HAIR. THIS WAS THE TENTH TIME HE HAD HAULED THEM TO BRIEFING ON POINTS OF DISCIPLINE.

WINTER TRAINING NOT
COLD KIM
WING
ICING



... AND ONE OTHER THING, — FLYING BOOTS AND PULLOVERS ARE OKAY DURING OPERATIONAL HOURS — BUT IN THE MESS AT NIGHT WE WILL WEAR DECENT SHIRTS AND TIES.

DON'T
TAKE A CHANCE
FLY
HOME!



REMEMBER!
MINIMUM OIL TEMP
FOR TAKEOFF
40°C!

MY GIDDY
AUNT!



SOON THE FLIGHT COMMANDERS WERE SEEKING OUT JOHNNIE IN HIS OFFICE, SAM TRYING TO SMOOTH OUT TROUBLED WATERS, BUT NOT SO BOB.

LOOK, JOHNNIE, — LET ME TRY AND PUT THE AMERICAN POINT OF VIEW...

WHAT I SAY IS — LET THE BOYS FIGHT THE WAR IN THEIR OWN SWEET WAY — THE WAY THEY WERE BROUGHT UP!



JOHNNIE'S VIEW WAS — NO DISCIPLINE, NO TEAM WORK. THE MEN HAD JOINED OF THEIR OWN FREE WILL SO THEY SHOULD NOT COMPLAIN AT THE RULES.

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN JUST FLYING A KITE AND I'M AFRAID SOME WILL ONLY LEARN AT THE PRICE OF THEIR BUDDIES' LIVES!



ONE SUMMER MORNING, AMIDST THIS HALF VEILED HOSTILITY, THEIR FIRST ALARM CAME. NONE WOULD FORGET IT, CERTAINLY NOT JOHNNIE WHO DESPAIRED AT THE SHAMBLES THAT FOLLOWED THAT RINGING CALL TO ACTION.



THE SQUADRON TOOK OFF IN ONES AND TWOS AND STRAGGLED BEHIND A FURIOUS JOHNNIE.



GABBLING AWAY ON THE RADIO TELEPHONE, THE EXCITED AMERICANS FORMED ON JOHNNIE'S LEADING PLANE AND PRESENTLY CROSSED OUT OVER DOVER.



FRANKIE BAINES WAS THE MOST TALKATIVE AND SOON HE HAD SOMETHING TO HOLLER ABOUT...



SUDDENLY, THE AMERICANS FOUND THEMSELVES SAVAGELY SCATTERED BY THE ME. 109S. IF THE R/T HAD BEEN TALKATIVE BEFORE, IT WAS NOW A FRENZY OF ALARMS . . .

WOW! THE SKY'S FULL OF THEM!

HE'S ON YOUR TAIL, JEFF!

THEN KNOCK HIM OFF, YOU SCREAMING DOPE!

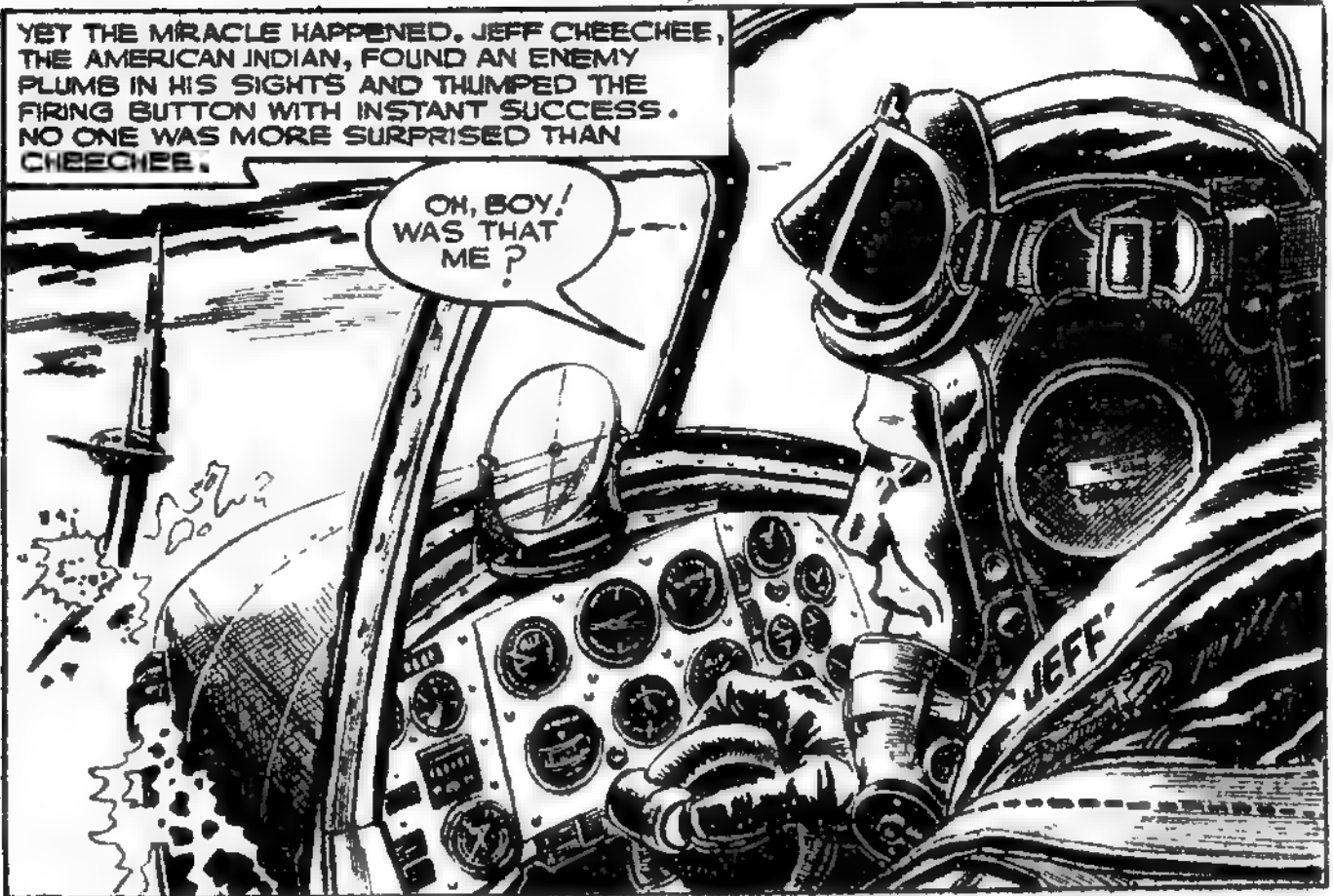
BROTHER—THIS IS SOME PARTY!

STOP YELLING, EVERYBODY!



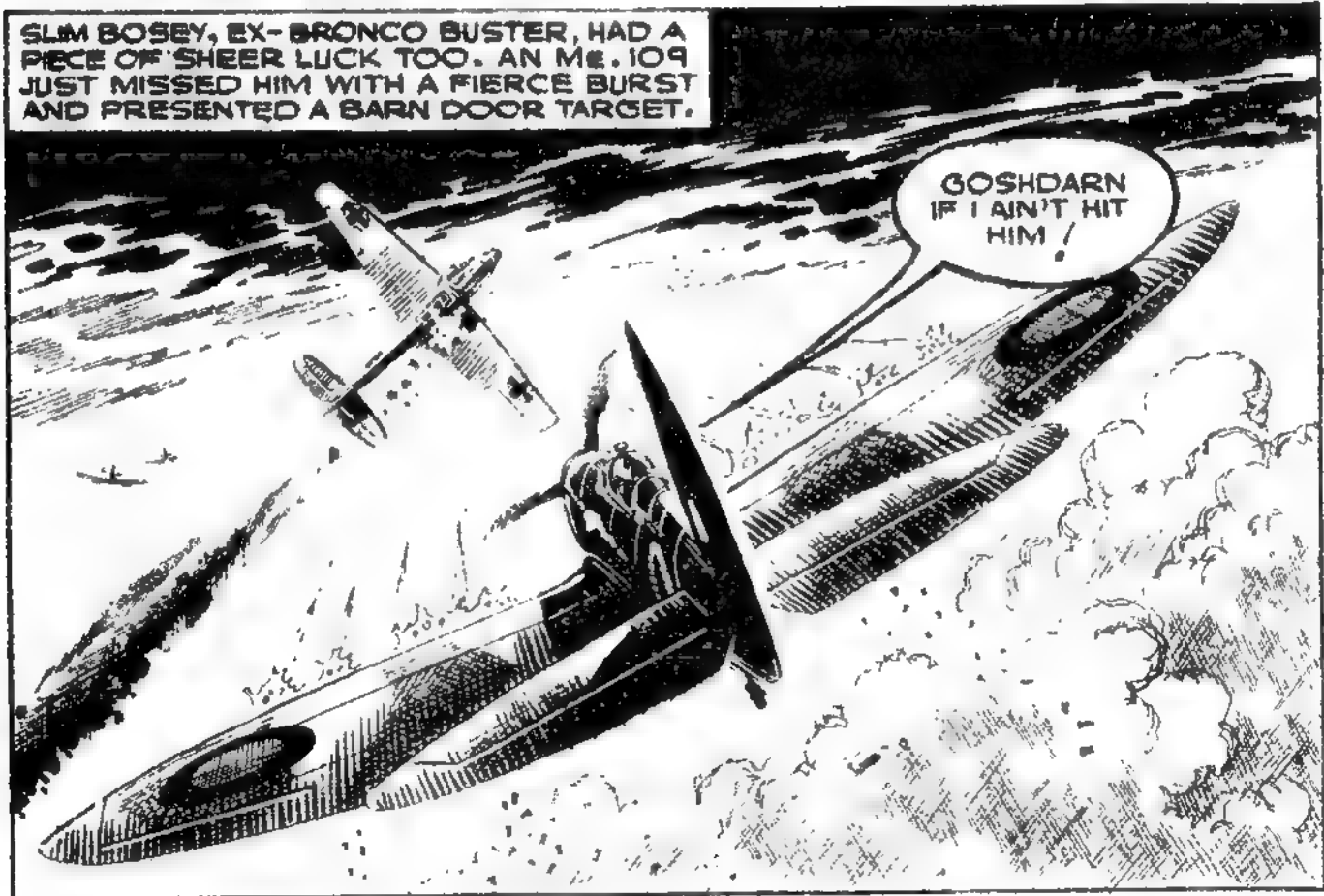
YET THE MIRACLE HAPPENED. JEFF CHEECHEE, THE AMERICAN INDIAN, FOUND AN ENEMY PLUMB IN HIS SIGHTS AND THUMPED THE FIRING BUTTON WITH INSTANT SUCCESS. NO ONE WAS MORE SURPRISED THAN CHEECHEE.

OH, BOY!
WAS THAT
ME?



SLIM BOSEY, EX-BRONCO BUSTER, HAD A PIECE OF SHEER LUCK TOO. AN ME. 109 JUST MISSED HIM WITH A FIERCE BURST AND PRESENTED A BARN DOOR TARGET.

GOSH DARN
IF I AIN'T HIT
HIM!



THE SQUADRON RETURNED JUBILANT. IN THE MESS THAT NIGHT THEY WERE STILL TELLING EACH OTHER HOW THEY DID IT.

WHAT DID I TELL YA?
IT'S JUST TOO EASY!

SURE—
IT'S A CINCH!



BUT JOHNNIE, WITH THE WISDOM OF THE VETERAN YOUNG, KNEW THIS WAS NOT REAL SUCCESS. RATHER WAS IT A THREAT TO ALL THAT HE WAS TRYING TO TEACH THEM—THAT TRUE SUCCESS LAY IN SOUND TRAINING.



Chapter 2. THE REBELS

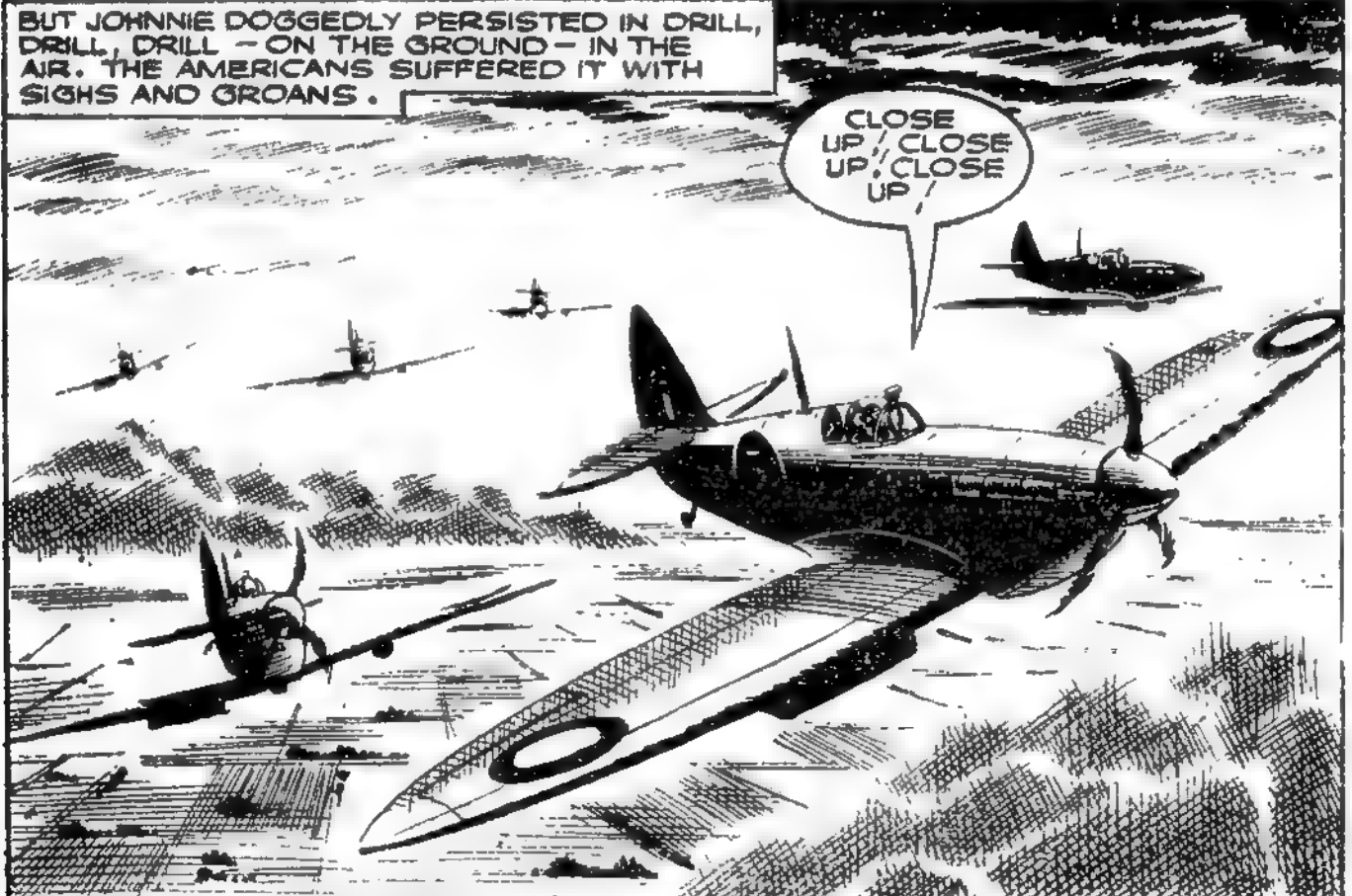
THE NEXT MORNING, JOHNNIE WAS AWARE THAT THE COCK-A-HOOP AMERICANS WERE EYING HIM MOCKINGLY. BOB SCREIBER'S WORDS NEATLY SUMMED UP THE SITUATION . . .

SURE, THEY UNDERSTAND TEAMWORK, JOHNNIE — THEY PLAY FOOTBALL. BUT THEY DON'T FIGHT THE SAME WAY AS YOU ENGLISH!



BUT JOHNNIE DOGGEDLY PERSISTED IN DRILL, DRILL, DRILL — ON THE GROUND — IN THE AIR. THE AMERICANS SUFFERED IT WITH SIGHS AND GROANS.

CLOSE UP / CLOSE UP / CLOSE UP /



ANOTHER THING THAT WORRIED JOHNNIE WAS THE SQUADRON'S IGNORANCE IN AIRCRAFT RECOGNITION. ROLLINS, THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER, HAD NEWS THAT WAS EVEN MORE EXASPERATING . . .

I'M SORRY TO SAY, SIR, BUCK GEARY DIDN'T EVEN TROUBLE TO DO THE AIRCRAFT RECOGNITION TEST.

HAVE GEARY SENT TO ME WHEN YOU LEAVE, ROLLINS. I'LL HAVE A WORD WITH HIM ABOUT THIS!



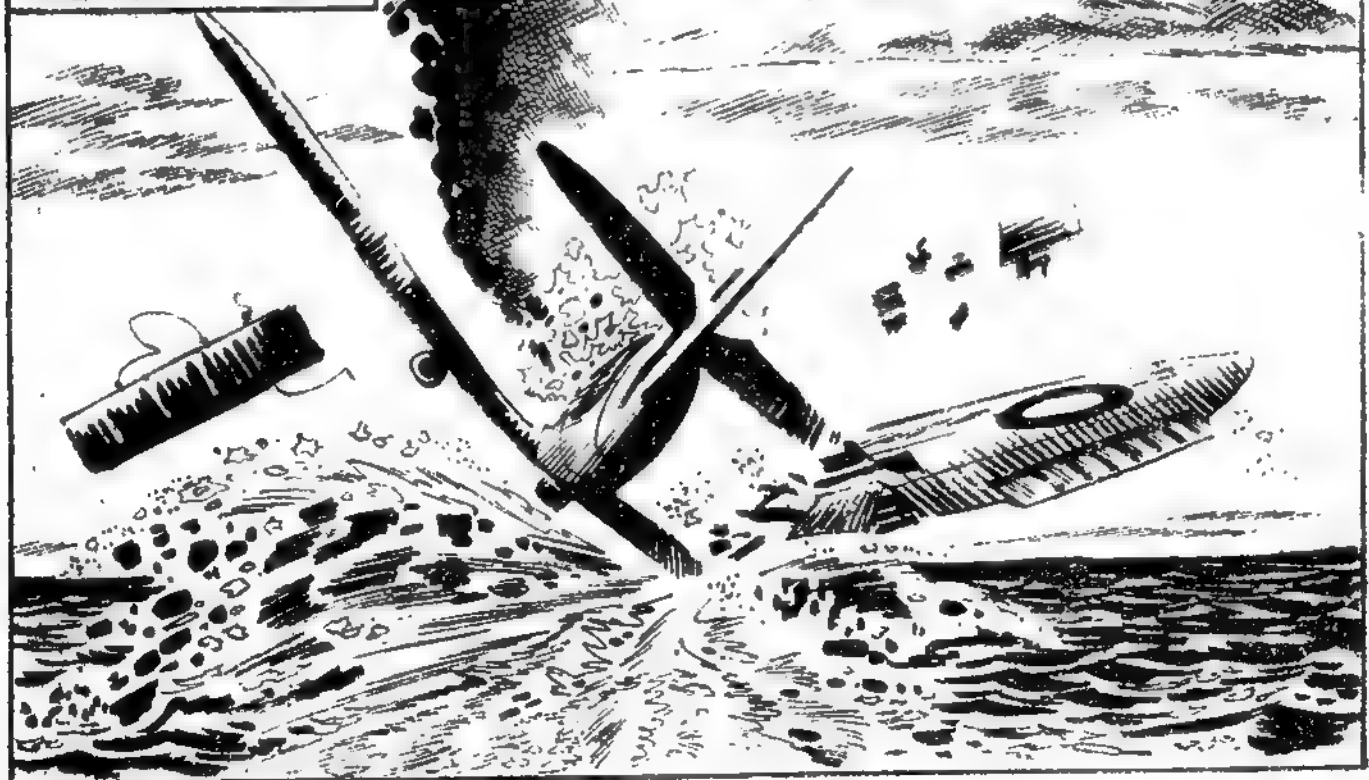
THERE WAS A STORMY SCENE BETWEEN JOHNNIE AND THE INDOLENT BUCK GEARY.

THE TEST WAS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD, GEARY. DON'T YOU REALISE THAT POOR RECOGNITION CAN COST A PILOT HIS LIFE!

UH-HUH!



THE NEXT DAY THERE WAS ANOTHER "SCRAMBLE" AND FRANKIE BAINES WAS POUNCED ON BY THE ENEMY AND SHOT INTO THE SEA. NO TRACE WAS LEFT OF HIM.



THE AMERICANS RETURNED SORE AND RATTLED. WITHOUT A WORD THEY PULLED OUT OF DISPERSAL AND MADE FOR THE MESS. BUT JOHNNIE HAD DIFFERENT IDEAS AND SPRANG TO THE TELEPHONE TO WARN THE GUARD AT THE GATE.

GUARD ROOM? THIS IS SQUADRON LEADER MEDWIN. MY ORDERS ARE TO STOP 'B' FLIGHT AT THE GATES AND TO SEND THEM OVER TO INTELLIGENCE!

VERY GOOD, SIR!



THIS WAS DONE AND THE GUARD HAD TO STAND FIRM AGAINST THE THREATS OF THE ANGRY AMERICANS.

OPEN THE GATES OR WE'LL BUST YOU WIDE OPEN!

YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO US!

DURNED LIMEYS!



THEN, BOB SCREIBER, WITH SOME SENSE, PERSUADED HIS MEN TO DO AS THEY WERE ORDERED.



JOHNNIE AND SAM, WITH "A" FLIGHT, DID NOT HAVE LONG TO WAIT IN INTELLIGENCE BEFORE "B" FLIGHT STUMPED IN.

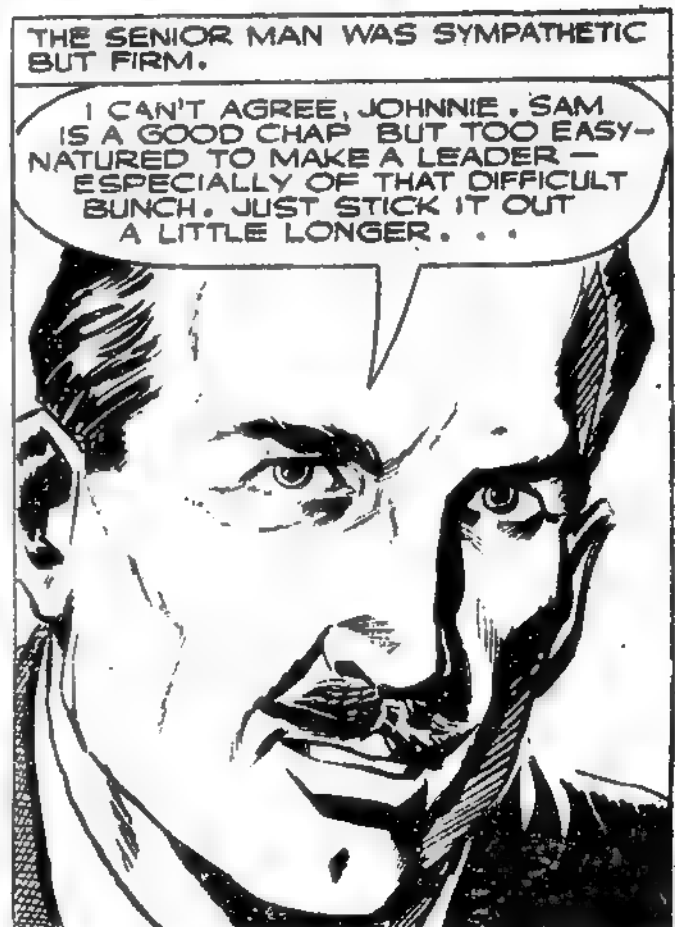
SAY, WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

WE'VE LOST A PAL—FRANKIE BAINES—AIN'T THAT ENOUGH?

WHAT MORE? SOME DODGASTED RECOGNITION OR SUMPIN'?

MORE BULL?





Suicide Squadron

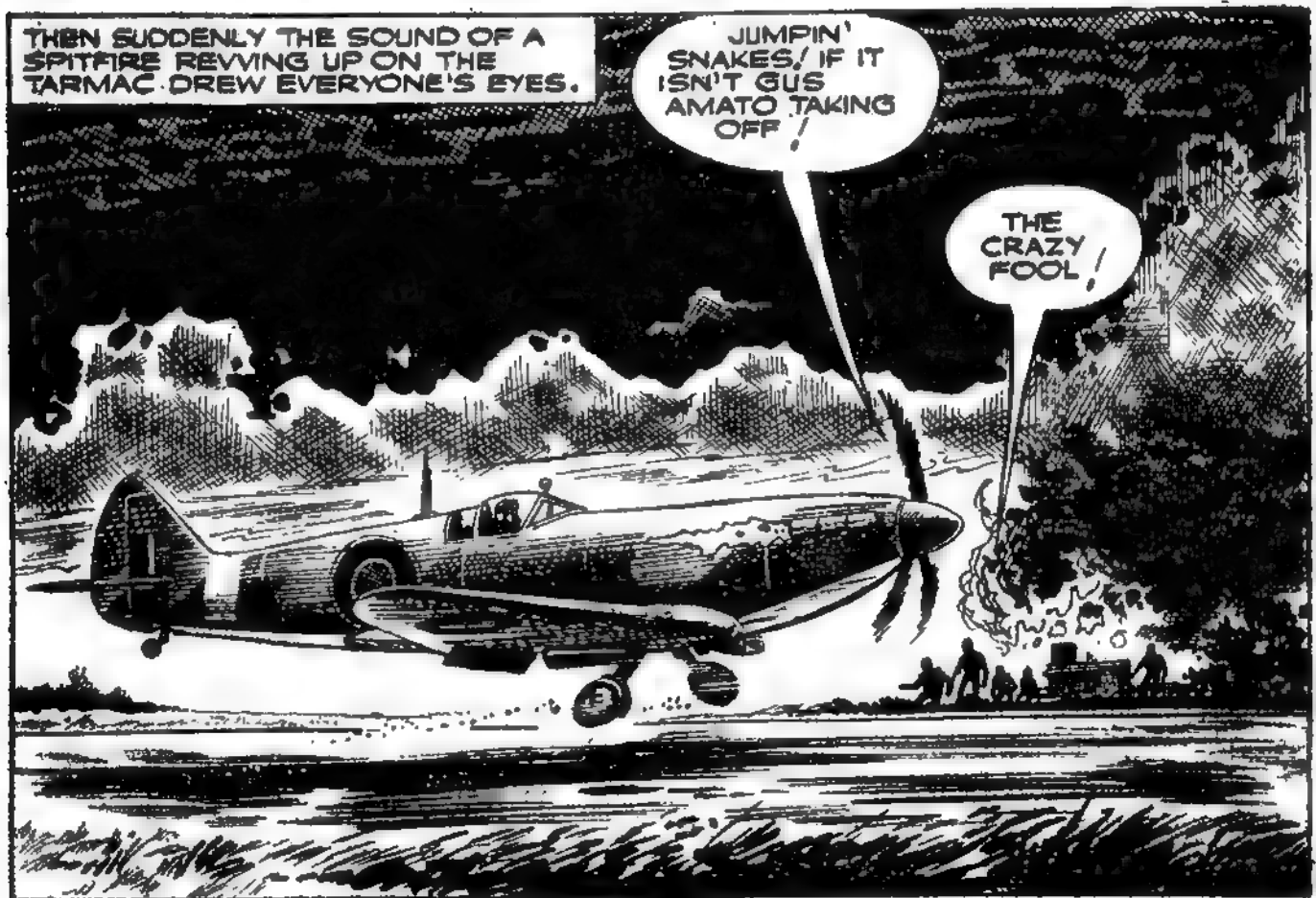
THAT SAME EVENING, THE BASE SIRENS SCREECHED OUT THEIR WARNING OF AN ATTACK, AND AS THE THREE SINISTER SHAPES OF GERMAN JU. 88 BOMBERS FLEW OVER THE AIRSTRIP UNLOADING THEIR STICKS OF BOMBS, THE AMERICAN AIRMEN HURRIEDLY SOUGHT COVER IN THE SLIT TRENCHES.



THE JU. 88'S SCREAMED ACROSS THE AERODROME, DEMOLISHING BUILDINGS AND WRECKING AIRCRAFT...



THEN SUDDENLY THE SOUND OF A SPITFIRE REVING UP ON THE TARMAC DREW EVERYONE'S EYES.



GUS AMATO, WHO HAD LANDED FROM A PRACTICE FLIGHT A FEW MOMENTS BEFORE THE SUDDEN ATTACK, WAS ANGERED BY THE ENEMY'S DARING AND HE HAD DECIDED TO TAKE OFF AND SHOW THE GERMANS WHERE THEY GOT OFF . . .

I'LL TEACH THOSE SQUAREHEADS TO COME BUSTING UP THE PLACE!



BUT GUS NEVER GOT TO SEE THE 88'S IN THE GATHERING DUSK AND LACKING NIGHT FLYING TRAINING, HIS IMPETUOSITY BACK-FIRED ON HIM WITH TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES.

WHERE'S THE RUNWAY?
I CAN'T SEE THE RUNWAY!



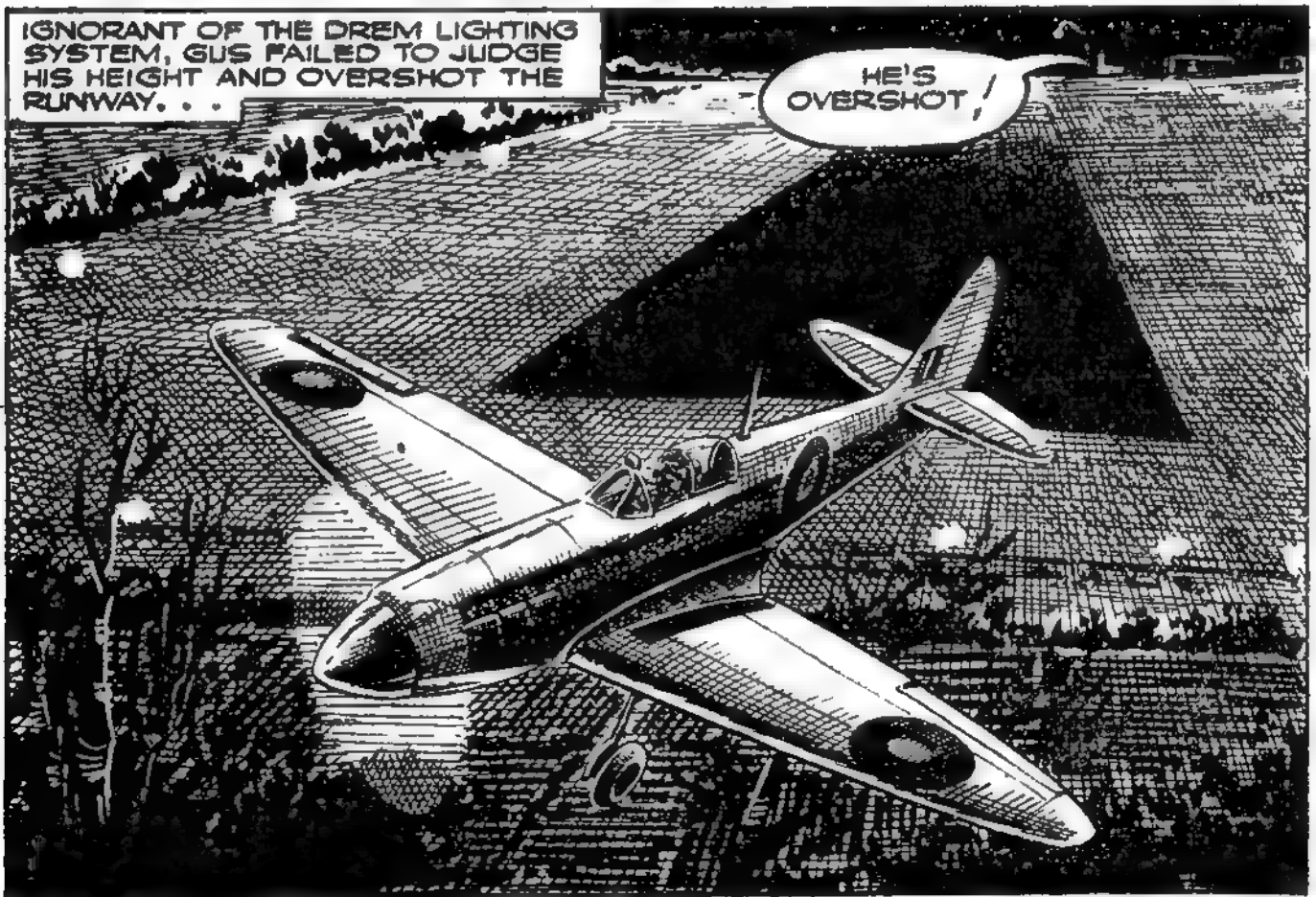
JOHNNIE SHOUTED INSTRUCTIONS TO THE WATCH-TOWER, WHILE SAM SNATCHED UP A VEREY PISTOL TO TRY TO GUIDE GUS'S ROCKETING AIRCRAFT. . .

SWITCH ON THE DREM LIGHTING!

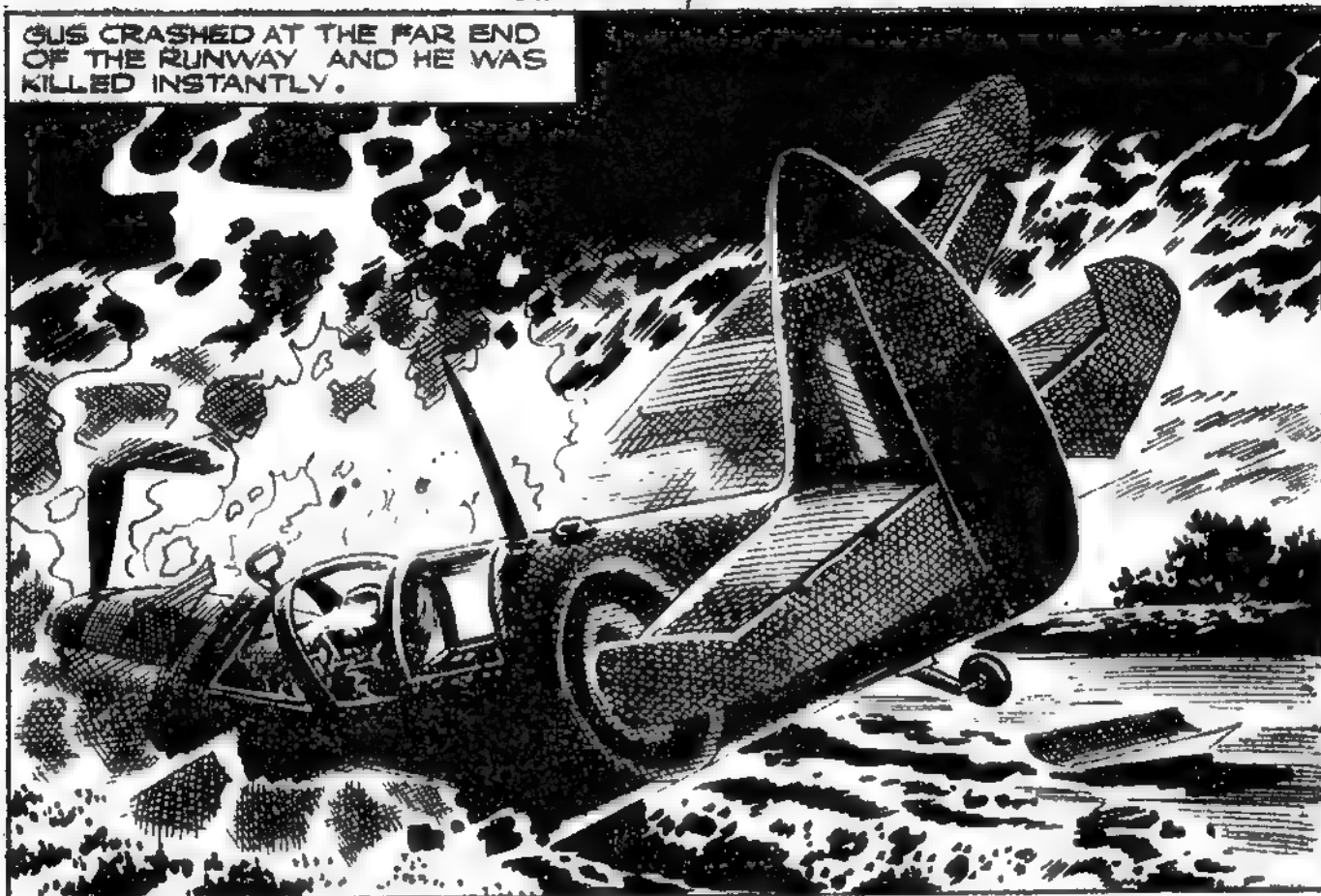


IGNORANT OF THE DREM LIGHTING SYSTEM, GUS FAILED TO JUDGE HIS HEIGHT AND OVERSHOT THE RUNWAY. . .

HE'S OVERSHOT!



GUS CRASHED AT THE FAR END OF THE RUNWAY AND HE WAS KILLED INSTANTLY.



IN THE SILENT AND SHOCKED MESS THAT NIGHT, BUCK GEARY WALKED OVER TO JOHNNIE FOR A SOUR DIG AT SERVICE PROCEDURE.

I SUPPOSE GUS DIED BECAUSE HE DIDN'T WAIT FOR THE ORDER TO GO SHOOT THE PANTS OFF THOSE EIGHTY-EIGHTS!



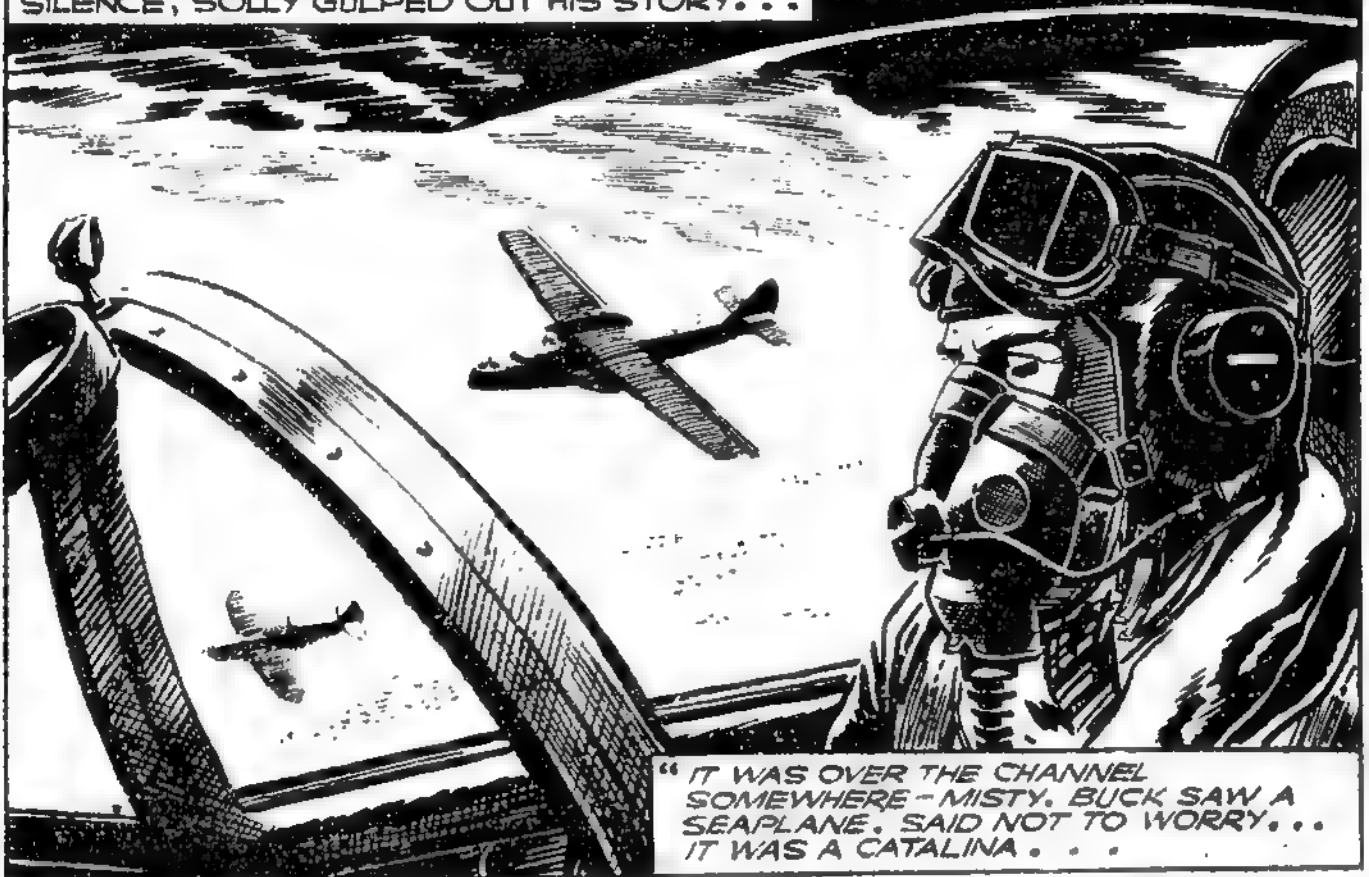


NEXT DAY, SOLLY KNOWLES LANDED IN A HURRY AND BURST INTO DISPERSAL, HIS FACE CHALK-WHITE.

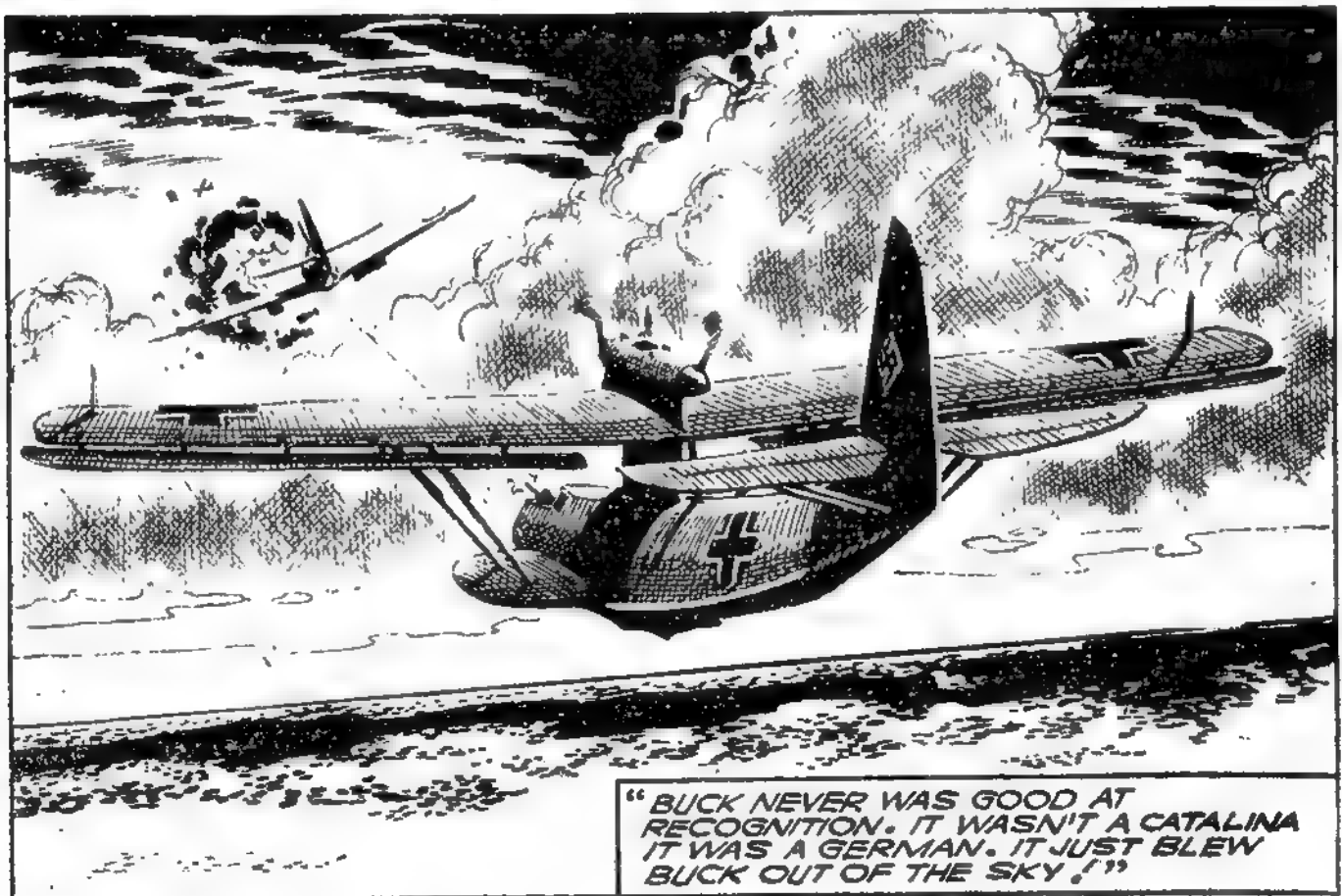


Suicide Squadron

AS THE OTHERS LISTENED IN STUNNED SILENCE, SOLLY GULPED OUT HIS STORY...



"IT WAS OVER THE CHANNEL SOMEWHERE - MISTY. BUCK SAW A SEAPLANE. SAID NOT TO WORRY... IT WAS A CATALINA..."



"BUCK NEVER WAS GOOD AT RECOGNITION. IT WASN'T A CATALINA IT WAS A GERMAN. IT JUST BLEW BUCK OUT OF THE SKY!"

Chapter 3. LEARNING THE HARD WAY

A WEEK LATER THE AMERICANS HAD COME TO BE KNOWN AS THE "SUICIDE SQUADRON"... AND THEY USED THE NAME ON THEMSELVES WITH A WRY SENSE OF HUMOUR.

WE AIN'T EDDICATED— THAT'S OUR TROUBLE!

SUICIDE SQUADRON



AT THAT MOMENT, JOHNNIE CAME UP TO GIVE THEM ANOTHER TALK ON TACTICS. THE AMERICAN BOYS STILL REMAINED ALOOF BUT THEY WERE MORE READY TO LISTEN TO THEIR SQUADRON LEADER, FOR THEY NOW REALISED THAT JOHNNIE TALKED SENSE.

... AND ONCE MORE, DON'T ACT INDEPENDENTLY... THAT WAY YOU GET YOURSELF INTO TROUBLE AND ALSO YOUR PALS WHO HAVE TO RESCUE YOU. I HOPE THAT IS UNDERSTOOD!



THAT AFTERNOON, JOHNNIE TOOK THE SQUADRON UP TO PRACTISE SOME TACTICAL FORMATIONS, WHEN SUDDENLY HIS EARPHONES CRACKLED URGENTLY . . .

HULLO, DOUGHBOY LEADER . . . ENEMY BOMBERS OVER THAMES ESTUARY AT FOUR THOUSAND FEET .

DOUGHBOY LEADER TO CONTROL, SHALL TRY TO INTERCEPT. OUT.

JOHNNIE WHEELED HIS SQUADRON AND LED THEM IN A ROCKETING CLIMB.

NOW, NO NATTERING, CHAPS. KEEP TOGETHER AND KEEP YOUR EYE ON ME.



JOHNNIE ARTFULLY TOOK THEM UP - SUN AND THEN THROUGH A CLOUD-BREAK . . . SUDDENLY THEY SPOTTED THE ENEMY BOMBERS.

THERE THEY ARE!

LOOK AT THE FAT SLUGS!

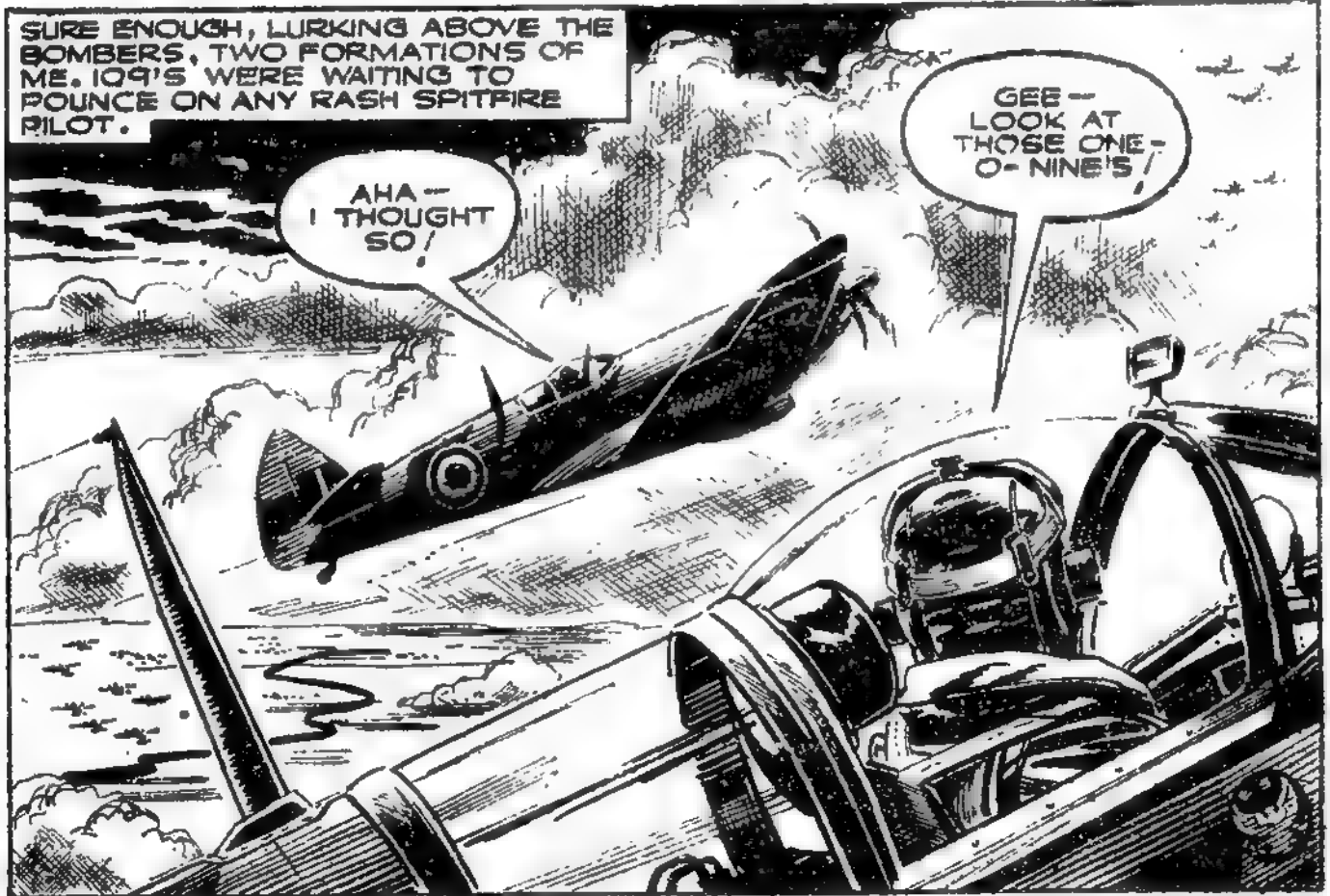
WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

NOT SO FAST, CHAPS. IT MAY BE A TRAP!

SURE ENOUGH, LURKING ABOVE THE BOMBERS, TWO FORMATIONS OF ME. 109'S WERE WAITING TO POUNCE ON ANY RASH SPITFIRE PILOT.

AHA - I THOUGHT SO!

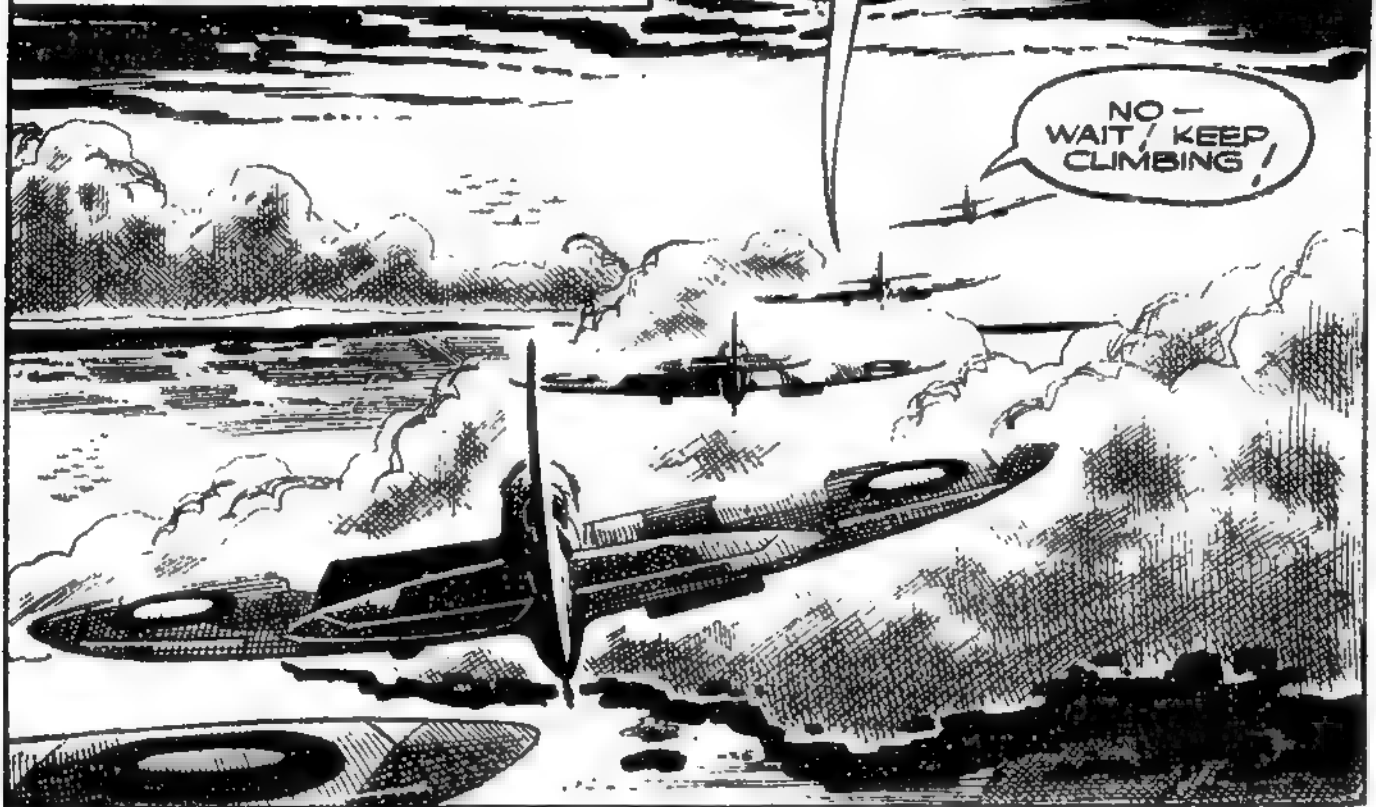
GEE - LOOK AT THOSE ONE-O-NINE'S!



THE EXCITED AMERICANS THOUGHT THEY HAD SPRUNG THE ENEMY TRAP, BUT THE WILY JOHNNIE WAS STILL SUSPICIOUS.

LET'S GO GET 'EM!

NO — WAIT / KEEP CLIMBING!



FOLLOWING JOHNNIE 2,000 FEET HIGHER, THE AMERICANS WERE SHOCKED TO FIND YET ANOTHER FLIGHT OF ME. 109'S — A TRAP SET ABOVE A TRAP!

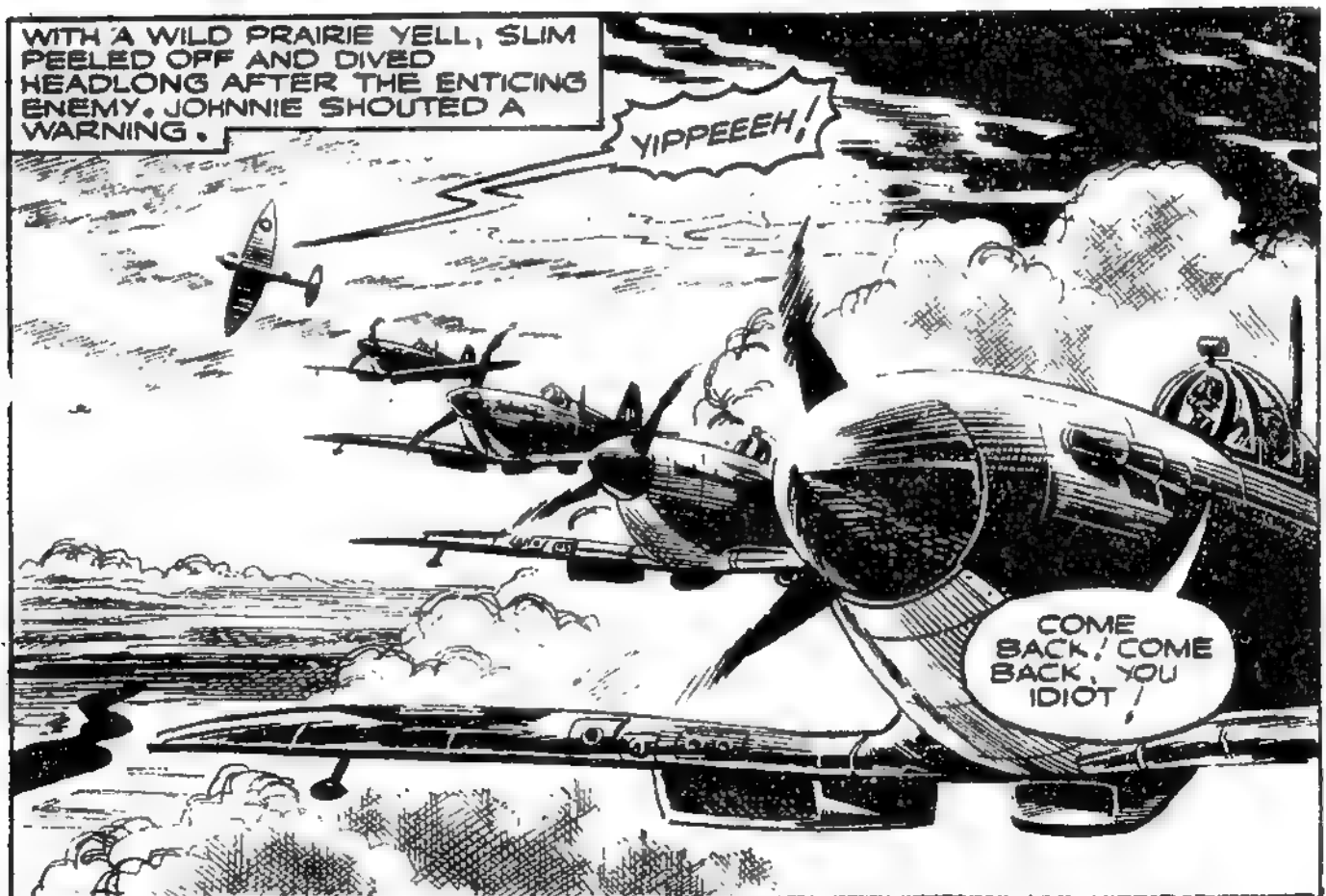
STEADY NOW / THIS IS IT!



BUT IN THE SAME SECOND, AN IRRESPONSIBLE YELL CAME FROM COWBOY SLIM BOSEY. HE HAD SPOTTED AN ME. 109 DRIFTING INNOCENTLY UNDER HIS NOSE. AND THE TEMPTATION WAS TOO MUCH FOR HIS FIERY NATURE.



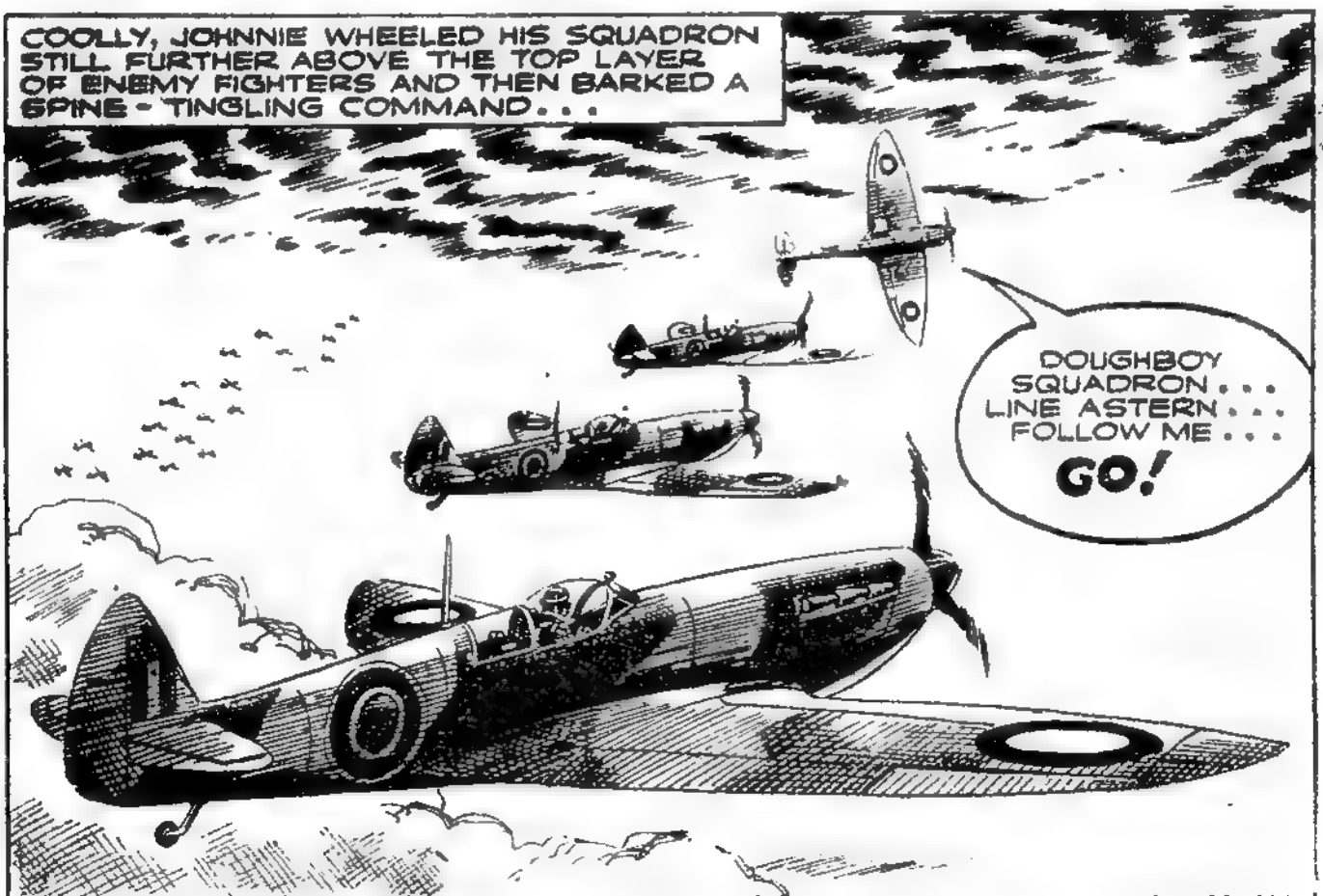
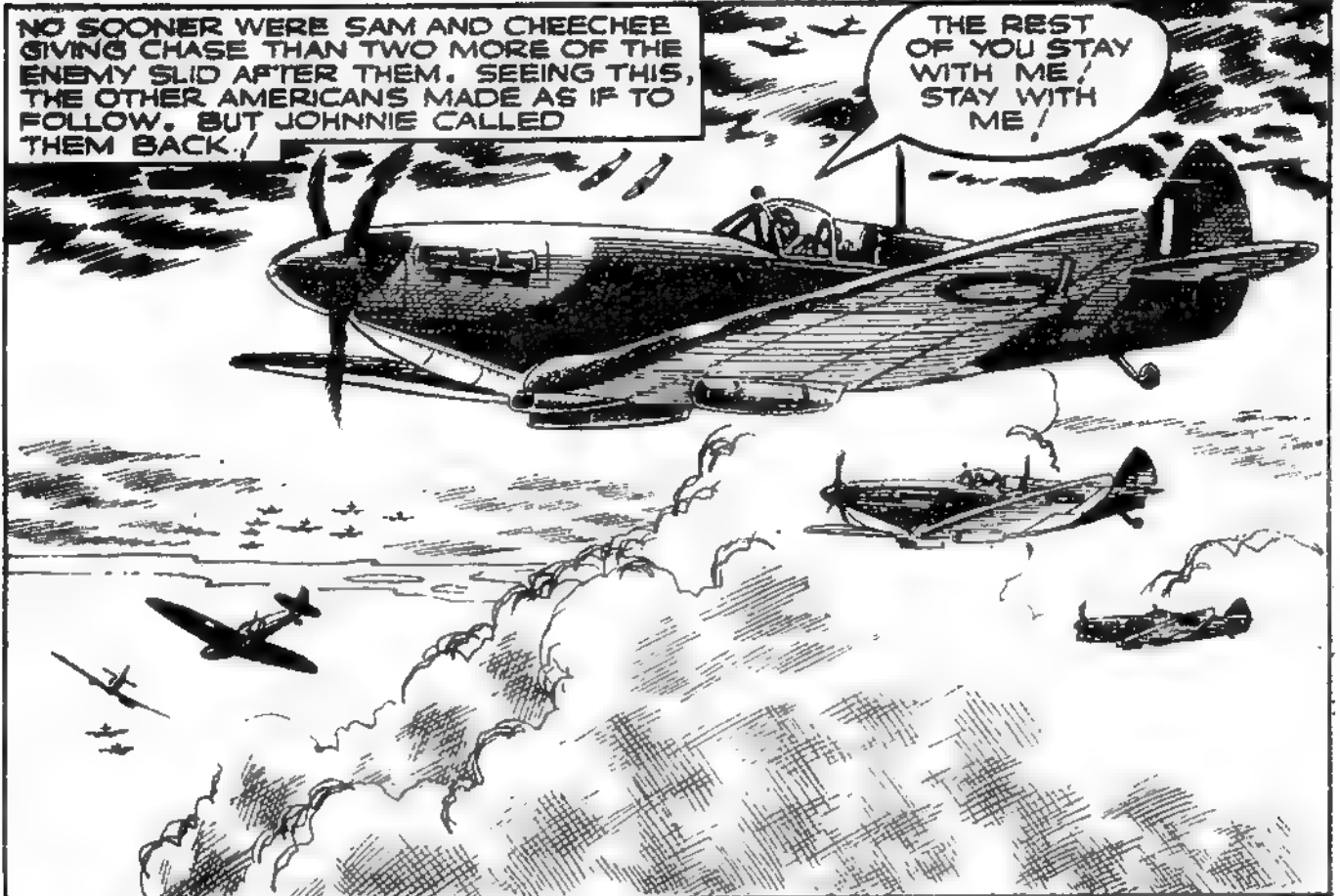
WITH A WILD PRAIRIE YELL, SLIM PEELED OFF AND DIVED HEADLONG AFTER THE ENTICING ENEMY. JOHNNIE SHOUTED A WARNING.



WITH A SINISTER FLICK OF ITS WINGS,
ANOTHER ME. 109 FELL IN BEHIND
SLIM - THE VICTIM OF AN OLD TRICK.
JOHNNIE SNAPPED AN ORDER TO
SAM AND JEFF CHEECHEE.

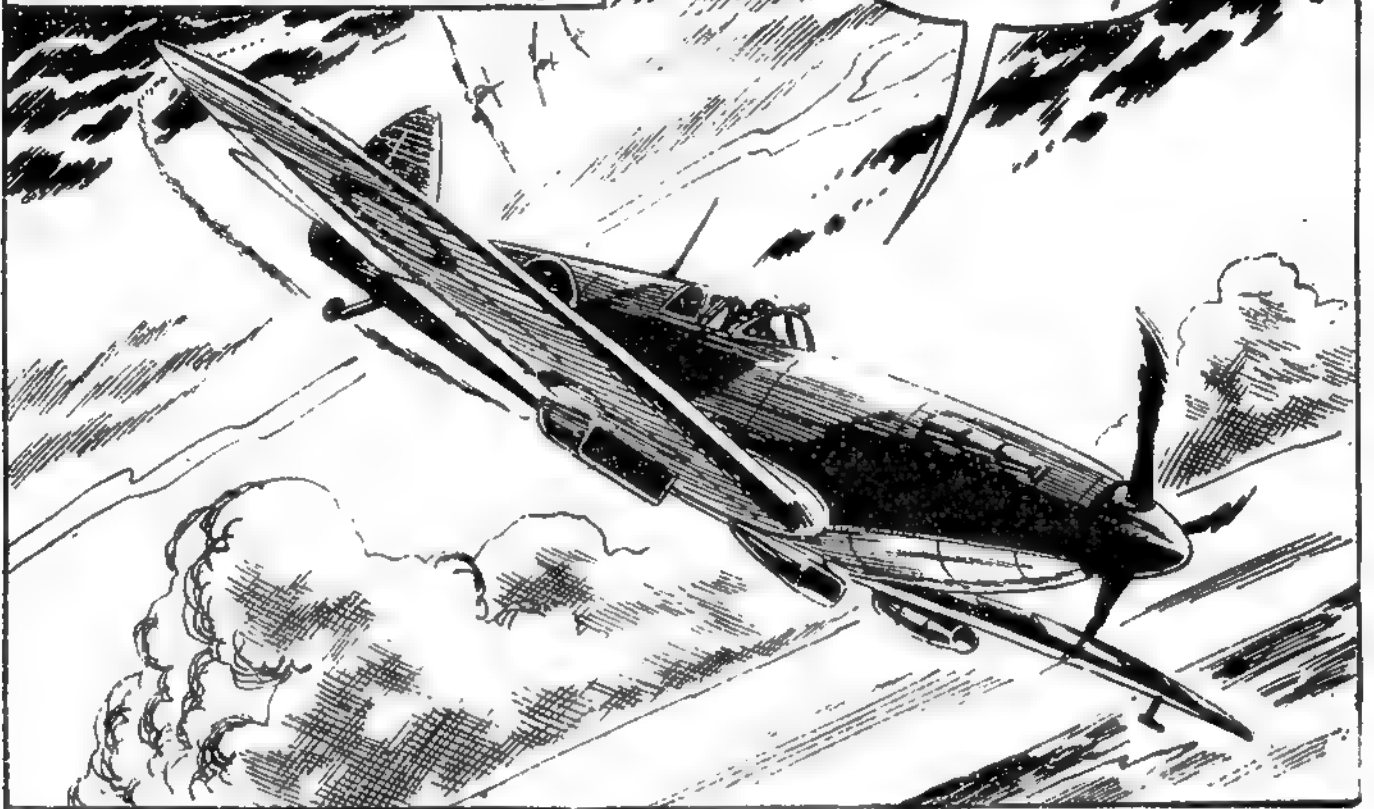
THAT
ONE-O-NINE
WILL GET SLIM!
DOUGHBOY BLUE
ONE AND TWO...
AFTER HIM!...
GO!





THE SQUADRON DIVED, YELLING FEROCIOUSLY AS THEY WENT. THIS WAS IT! THIS WAS THE ACTION THEY ALL DESIRED!

FOLLOW ME THROUGH! DON'T TANGLE WITH THEM!



THANKS TO JOHNNIE'S TACTICS, THE ENEMY, BLINDED BY THE SUN, WERE TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

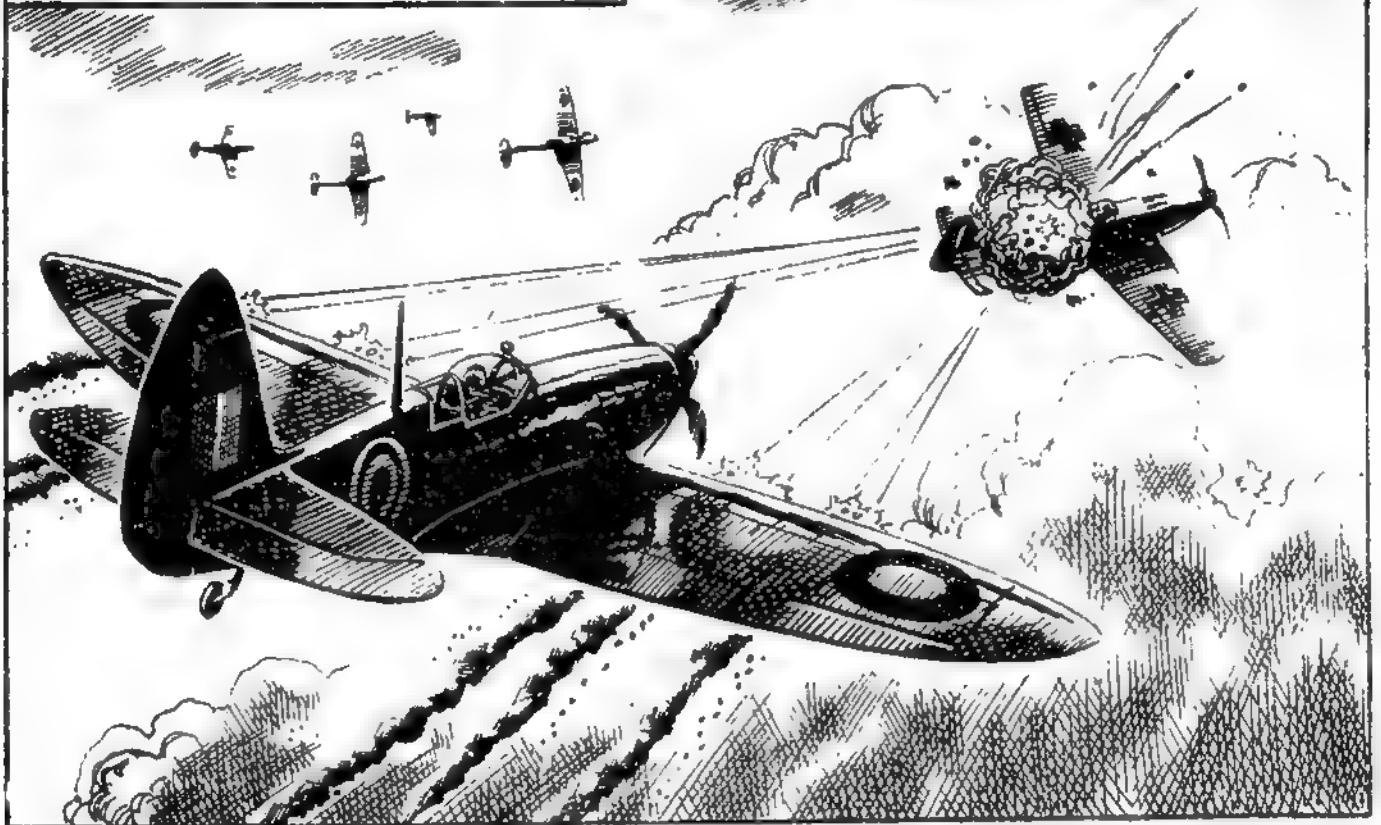
WHAM!

SLAM BANG!

HALLELUJAH!

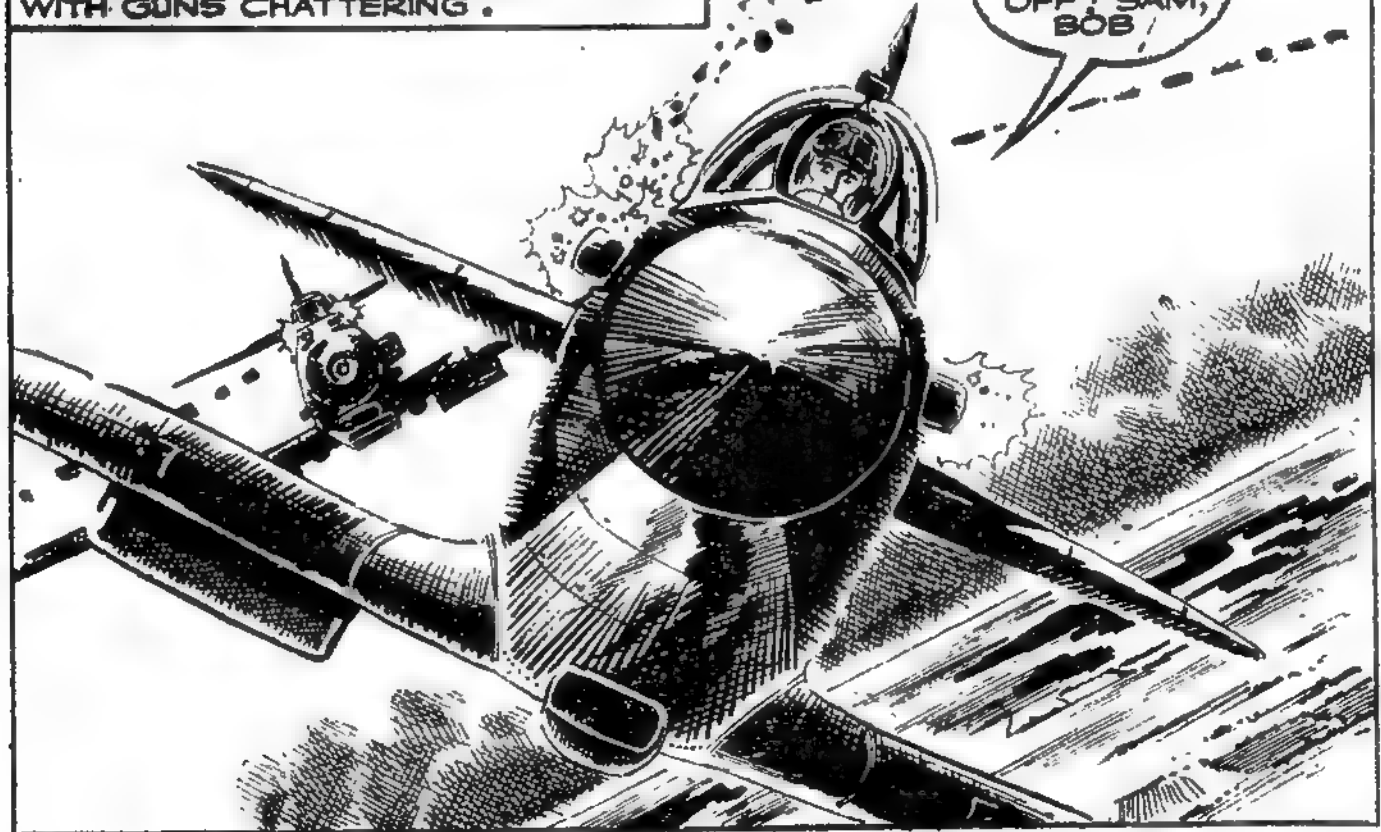


WITH A THREE SECOND BURST,
JOHNNIE BLEW THE ENEMY
LEADER'S PLANE APART.



MEANWHILE, THE IMPETUOUS SLIM
BOSEY WAS IN REAL TROUBLE, AS
A ME. 109 CLOSED ON HIS TAIL
WITH GUNS CHATTERING.

I CAN'T
SHAKE HIM
OFF / SAM,
BOB!

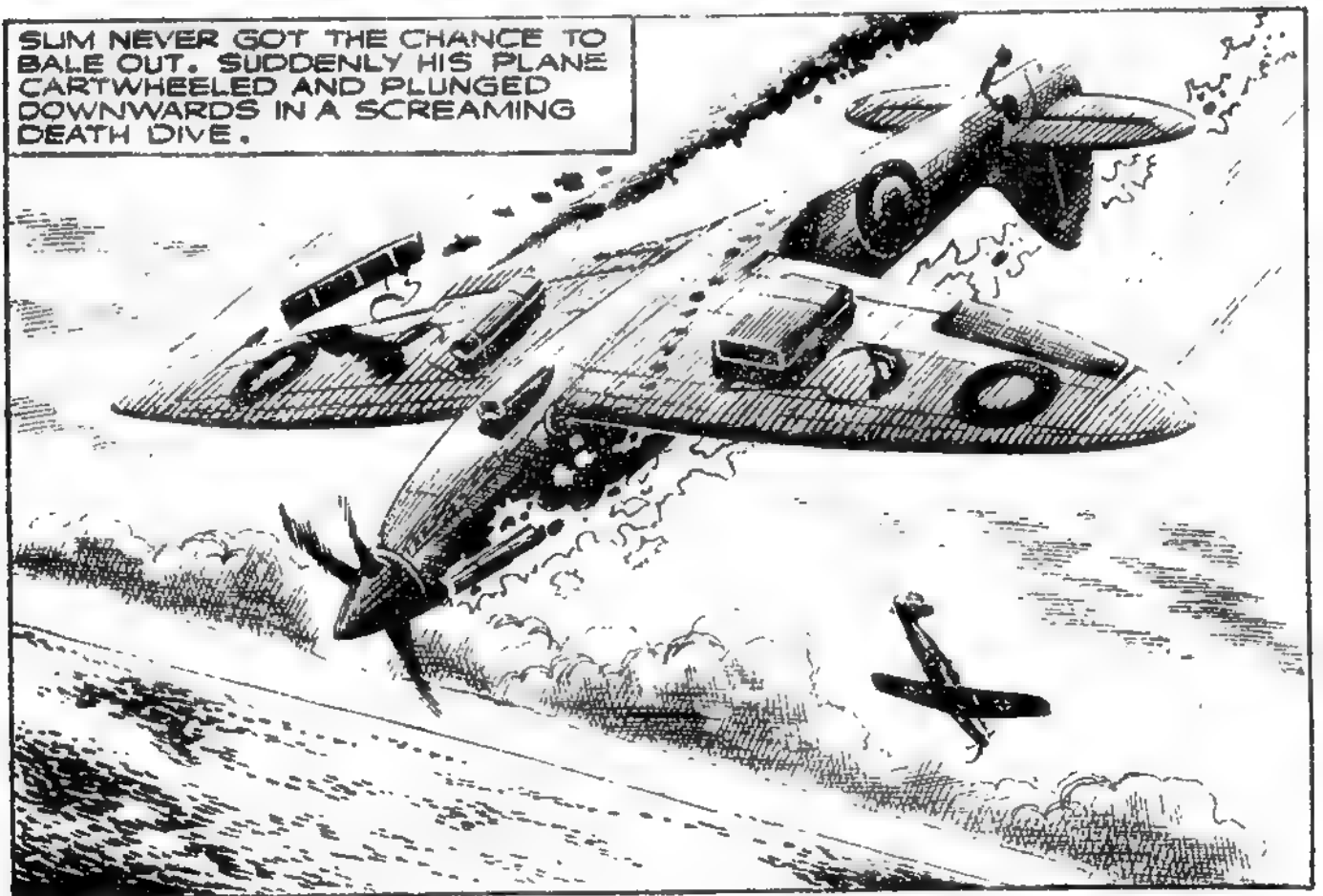


SAM, FOLLOWED BY THE FAITHFUL CHEECHEE, DESPERATELY TRIED TO CLOSE ON SLIM'S ATTACKER, BUT TOO LATE . . . THE AMERICAN'S PLANE HAD BEEN HIT AND WAS NOW BURNING . . .

BALE OUT,
SLIM! BALE
OUT!



SLIM NEVER GOT THE CHANCE TO BALE OUT. SUDDENLY HIS PLANE CARTWHEELED AND PLUNGED DOWNWARDS IN A SCREAMING DEATH DIVE.



AS SLIM'S ATTACKER PULLED UP INTO A CLIMB HE SWUNG RIGHT ACROSS SAM'S SIGHTS. IN A FLASH, SAM HAD THUMPED THE GUN BUTTON.



IN A FEW SECONDS, THE STRICKEN ENEMY PLANE HAD SPIRALLED DOWN TO THE SEA BELOW AND DISAPPEARED BENEATH THE WAVES. SAM CIRCLED THE SPOT AND THEN TURNED FOR HOME WITH A HORRIFIED JEFF CHEECHEE RIGHT BEHIND HIM.

JUMPING JOSEPH - BUT THIS IS A ROUGH WAR!



JOHNNIE KNEW BETTER THAN TO TALK ABOUT THE LESSONS WHICH HAD BEEN LEARNT, AT THE COST OF THE LIVES OF SLIM, BUCK AND GUS. BUT HE WAS AWARE OF A MORE RESPECTFUL LOOK IN THE FACES OF THE OTHER AMERICANS.

MESSE THAT MEDWIN FELLA AIN'T SO DUMB!

HE'S SURE A COOL CUSTOMER!

B' FLIGHT DISPER!



FROM THAT DAY OF THEIR FIRST REAL FLIGHT INTO ACTION AGAINST THE ENEMY, A NEW BRIGHTER SPIRIT BEGAN TO EMERGE FROM THE AMERICAN FLYERS. THEY RESPECTED JOHNNIE FOR HIS SOUND LEADERSHIP, AND AS THEY GREW TO LIKE THE ENGLISHMAN EVEN MORE, THEY MADE FUN OF HIS TYPICALLY ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS.

STEADY, CHAPS!

CALM AND COLLECTED, NOW!



GOOD SHOW, OLD BOY!

THERE WAS MORE DISCIPLINE IN THE AMERICAN UNIT AND MORE ATTENTION WAS PAID TO REPORTS AND TACTICAL TALKS. EVEN RECOGNITION TESTS PROVED TO BE GOOD FUN.

IT'S A HEINKEL!

IGNORANT CUSS, IT'S A DORNIER TWO-ONE-SEVEN!

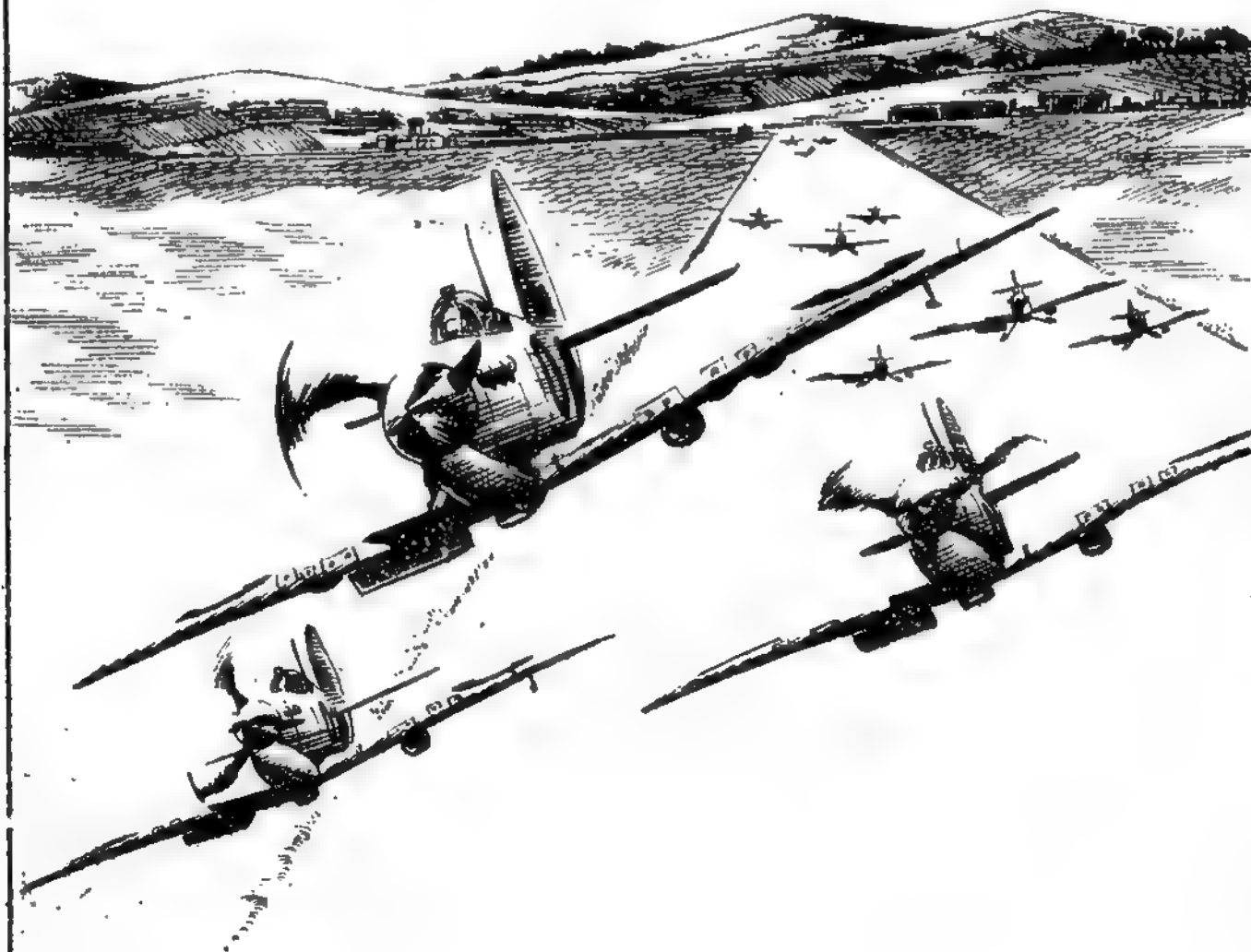


BUT JOHNNIE WELL KNEW THAT SAM WAS STILL TOPS WITH THE BOYS ALTHOUGH SAM HIMSELF WOULD NOT ENCOURAGE THAT VIEW. SAM KNEW JOHNNIE'S WORTH BETTER THAN ANYONE. BOB SCREIBER, WRITING HOME TO HIS FATHER'S NEWSPAPER, STILL SIGHED FOR AN ALL-AMERICAN SQUADRON. HE COULD NOT BRING HIMSELF TO ACCEPT JOHNNIE FULLY AS THEIR LEADER.



Chapter 4. WINNING THEIR SPURS

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, BOB SCREIBER WAS EXPERIENCING SOMETHING WORTH WRITING HOME ABOUT. A FACTORY AT ST. COL IN FRANCE WAS TO BE BOMBED BY WELLINGTONS. THE SQUADRON WAS PICKED TO GIVE THE BOMBERS CLOSE ESCORT COVER.



Suicide Squadron

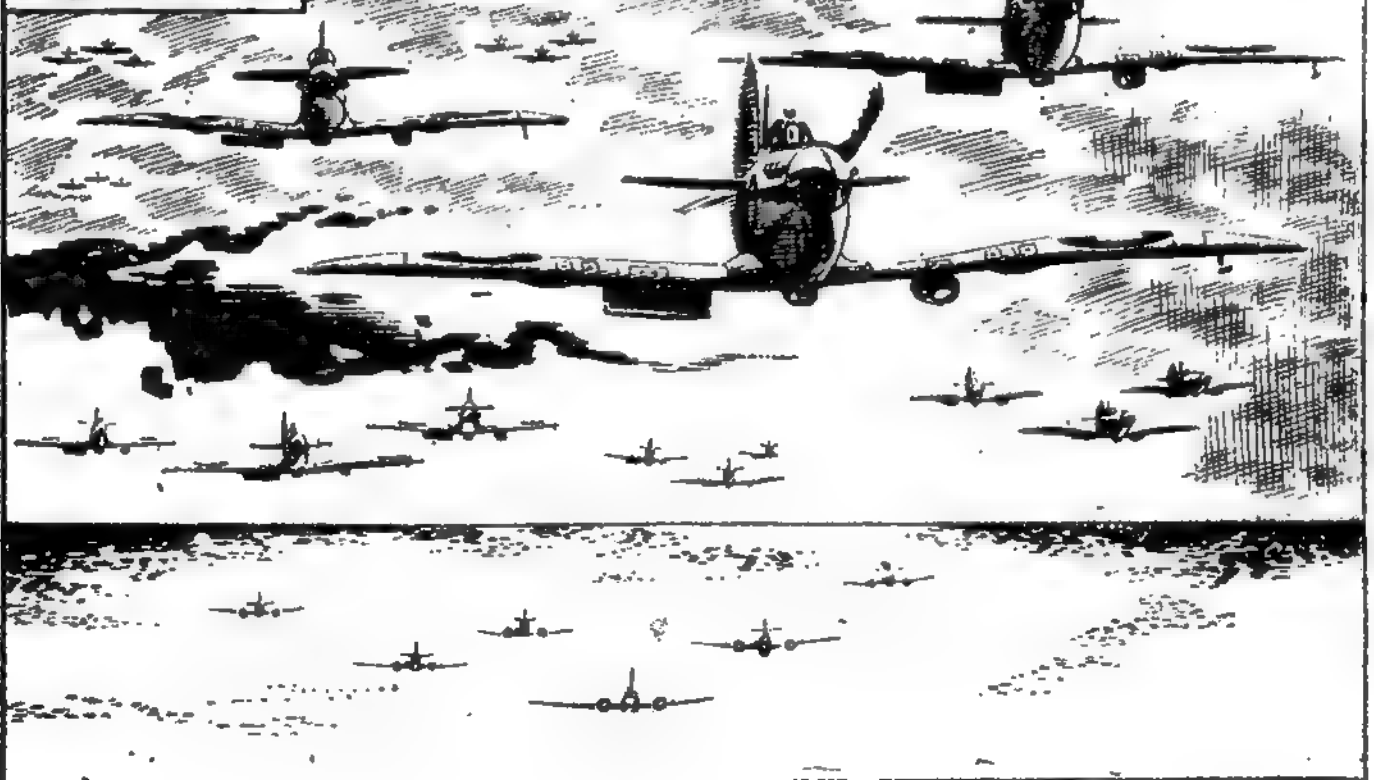
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THE SPITFIRES MET UP WITH THE GIANT BOMBERS OFF HASTINGS AND MADE STRAIGHT FOR THE FRENCH COAST.

NOW
QUIET, YOU
CHAPS!

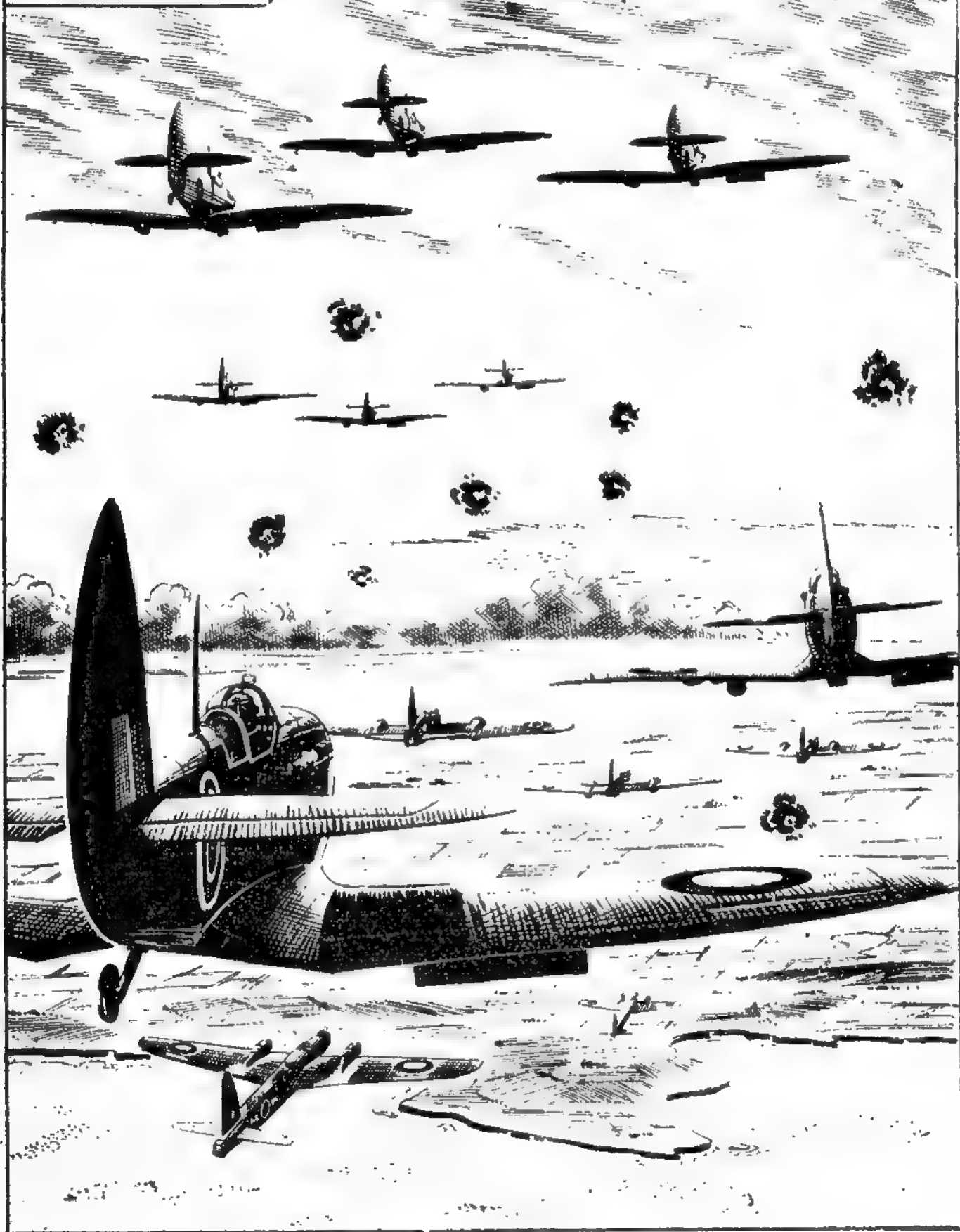


JOHNNIE'S JOB WAS TO STICK CLOSE ABOVE THE BOMBERS WHILE HE IN TURN WAS COVERED ABOVE AND BEHIND BY TWO MORE FIGHTER SQUADRONS.



Suicide Squadron

OVER THE FRENCH COAST, PUFFS OF BLACK SMOKE
APPEARED AMONG THEM. IN THE DISTANCE
A SWARM OF FIGHTERS WERE MASSING
OMINOUSLY . . .



SUDDENLY A BOMBER WAS HIT AND BURST INTO FLAMES. TENSION BEGAN TO MOUNT.



NOW THE ENEMY FIGHTERS WERE COMING. JOHNNIE'S VOICE CAME SOOTHINGLY. . .

CLOSE IN, CHAPS. THAT'S BETTER. CALM AND COLLECTED, NOW.



THE ME. 109'S FLUNG THEMSELVES AT THE TOP COVER OF SPITFIRES AND SOON THE SKY WAS A MAD WHIRLPOOL OF TWISTING PLANES LOCKED IN COMBAT.

LOOK AT THAT HUN SPINNING IN!

BROTHER, IS THIS WAR!

KEEP TOGETHER, EVERYBODY! KEEP WITH THE BOMBERS!

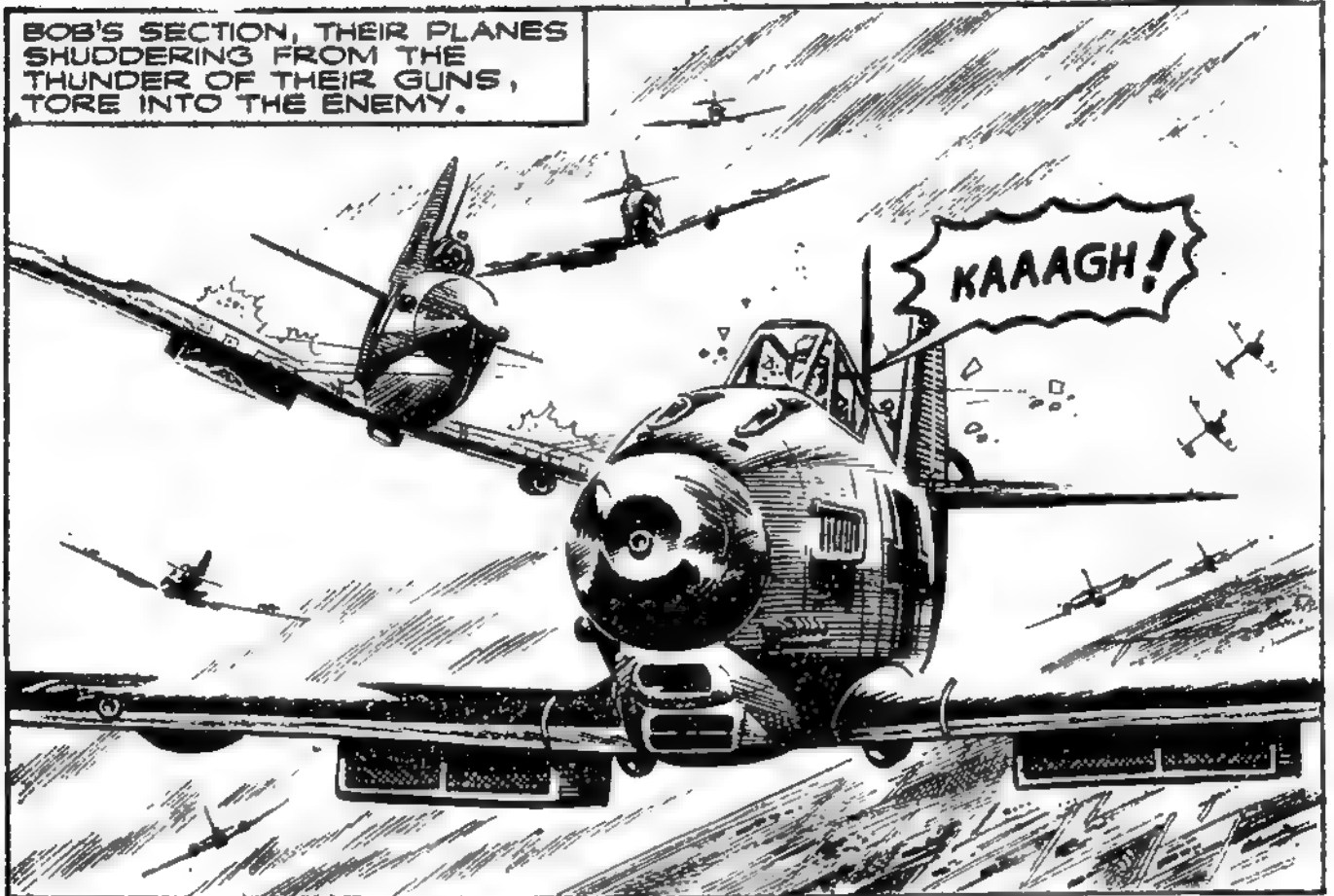


A SECTION OF ME. 109'S STORMED AT THE BOMBERS. JOHNNIE'S ORDER PIERCED THE EXCITED R/T TALK, AND BOB SCREIBER SMARTLY DIVED HIS SECTION AT THE INTRUDERS.

DOUGHBOY RED SECTION . . . ATTACK!



BOB'S SECTION, THEIR PLANES SHUDDERING FROM THE THUNDER OF THEIR GUNS, TORE INTO THE ENEMY.



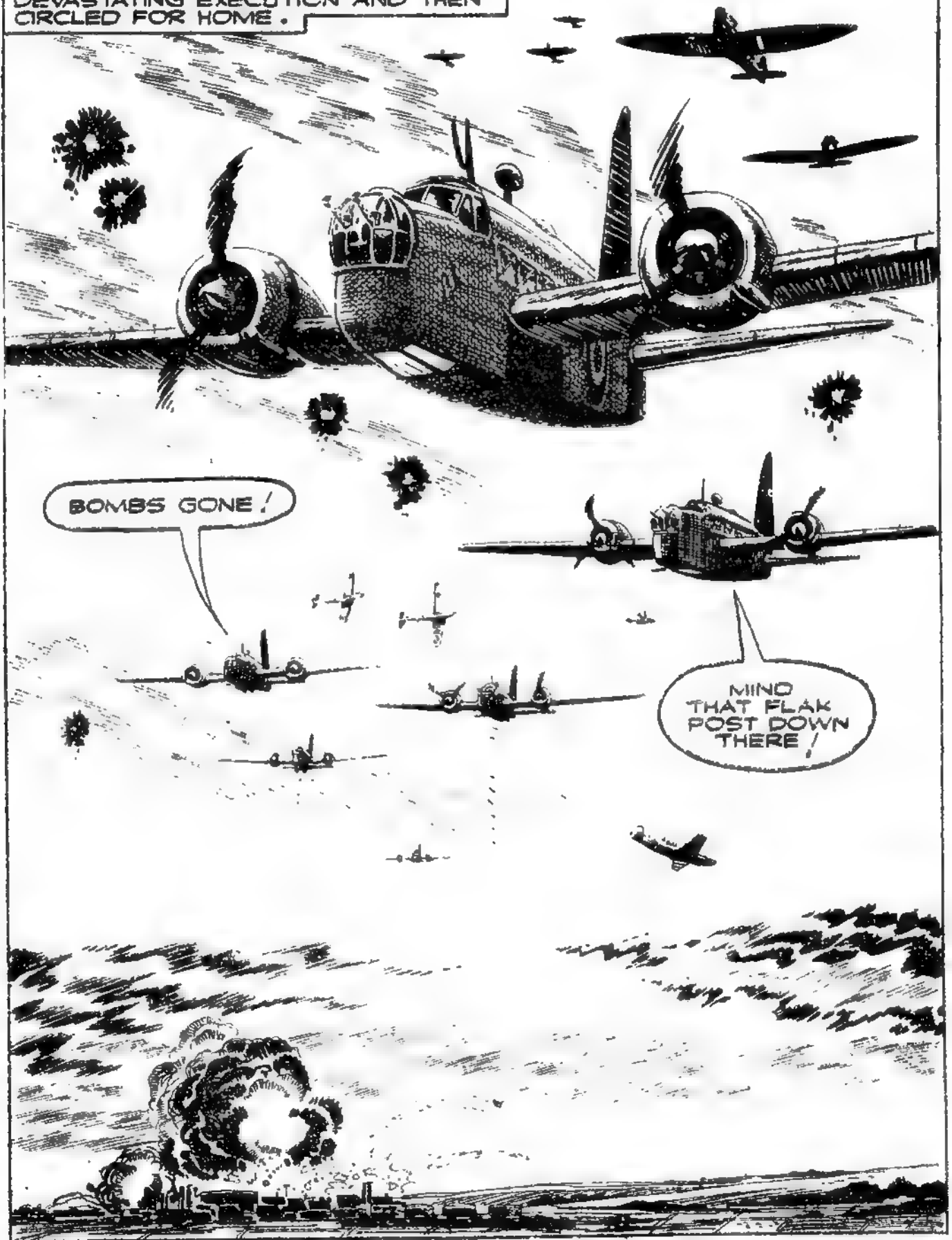
BOB'S SUCCESSFUL COUNTER ATTACK LASTED BARELY THIRTY SECONDS. PRESENTLY HE RETURNED HIS SECTION SAFELY TO THE SQUADRON. THE BOMBERS DRONED ON. NOW THE TARGET WAS IN SIGHT.

DOUGHBOY
RED ONE TO
DOUGHBOY
LEADER...
ONE ENEMY
DESTROYED
AND TWO
DAMAGED

NICE
WORK, BOB!
KEEP YOUR EYES
SKINNED,
EVERYBODY!



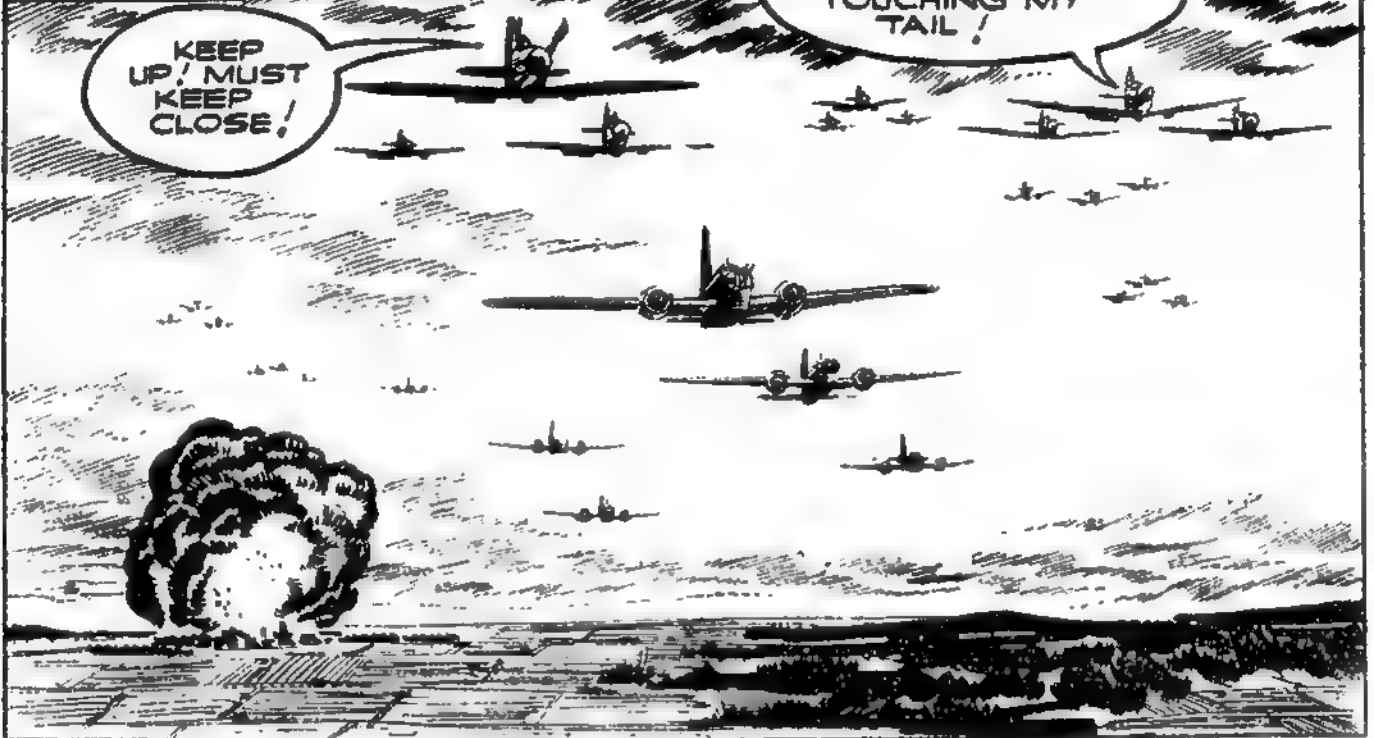
THE BOMBERS REACHED THE TARGET,
DROPPED THEIR BOMBS WITH
DEVASTATING EXECUTION AND THEN
CIRCLED FOR HOME.



JOHNNIE'S BOYS CIRCLED OVERHEAD AND THEN FOLLOWED THE BOMBERS OUT. ALL KNEW THAT THE WORST WAS TO COME. BY NOW THE ENEMY DEFENCE FIGHTERS WERE UP IN NUMBERS.

KEEP UP! MUST KEEP CLOSE!

GOSHDARN! PETE'S PRACTICALLY TOUCHING MY TAIL!



THOROUGHLY ROUSED, THE ENEMY NOW MET THEM IN FORCE. THE WELLINGTONS SWOOPED TO SAFETY AT TREE-TOP LEVEL LEAVING JOHNNIE TO DO HIS JOB, — ENGAGE THE HUN!

GEE! — THERE'S THOUSANDS OF 'EM!

WAIT FOR IT, FELLOWS!

ATTACK!



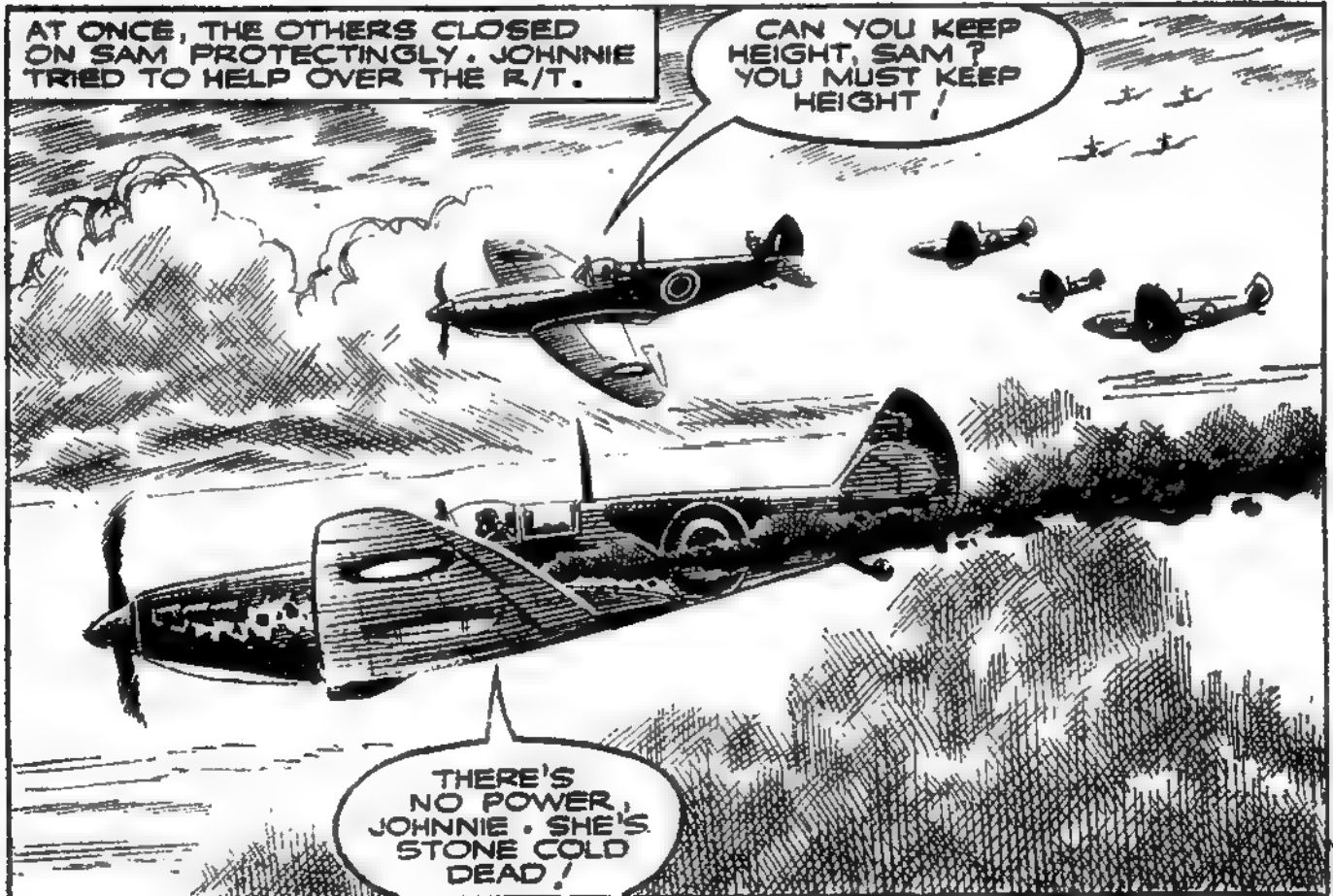
THE SQUADRON SLAMMED THROUGH THE MILLING ENEMY FIGHTERS AND EMERGED MIRACULOUSLY UNTOUCHED. THEN OUT OVER THE SEA, SAM RAN INTO TROUBLE.

I'M HIT, JOHNNIE!
SOME POLECAT'S
SLUGGED ME IN THE
MOTOR!



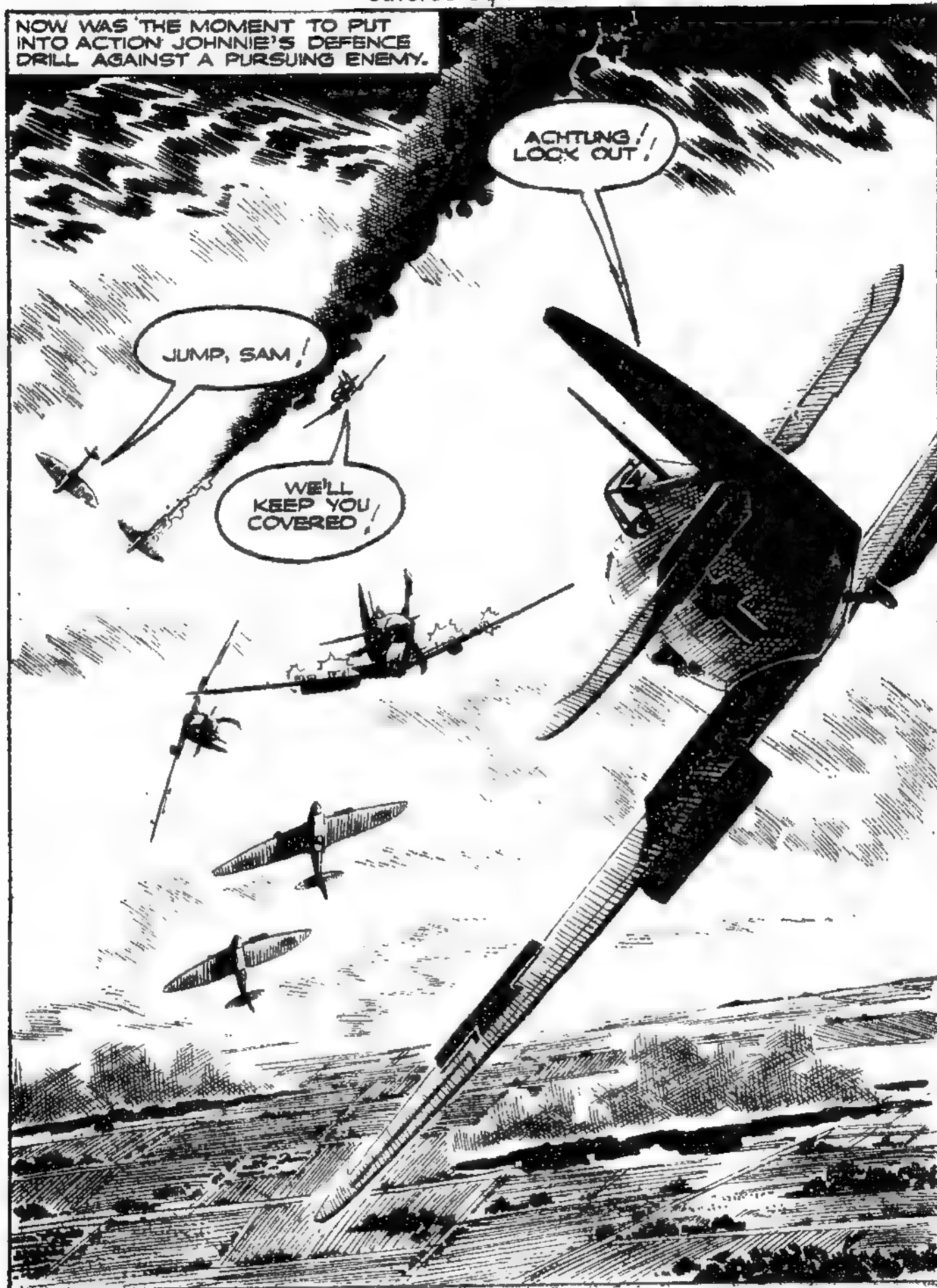
AT ONCE, THE OTHERS CLOSED ON SAM PROTECTINGLY. JOHNNIE TRIED TO HELP OVER THE R/T.

CAN YOU KEEP
HEIGHT, SAM?
YOU MUST KEEP
HEIGHT!



THERE'S
NO POWER,
JOHNNIE. SHE'S
STONE COLD
DEAD!

NOW WAS THE MOMENT TO PUT INTO ACTION JOHNNIE'S DEFENCE DRILL AGAINST A PURSUING ENEMY.

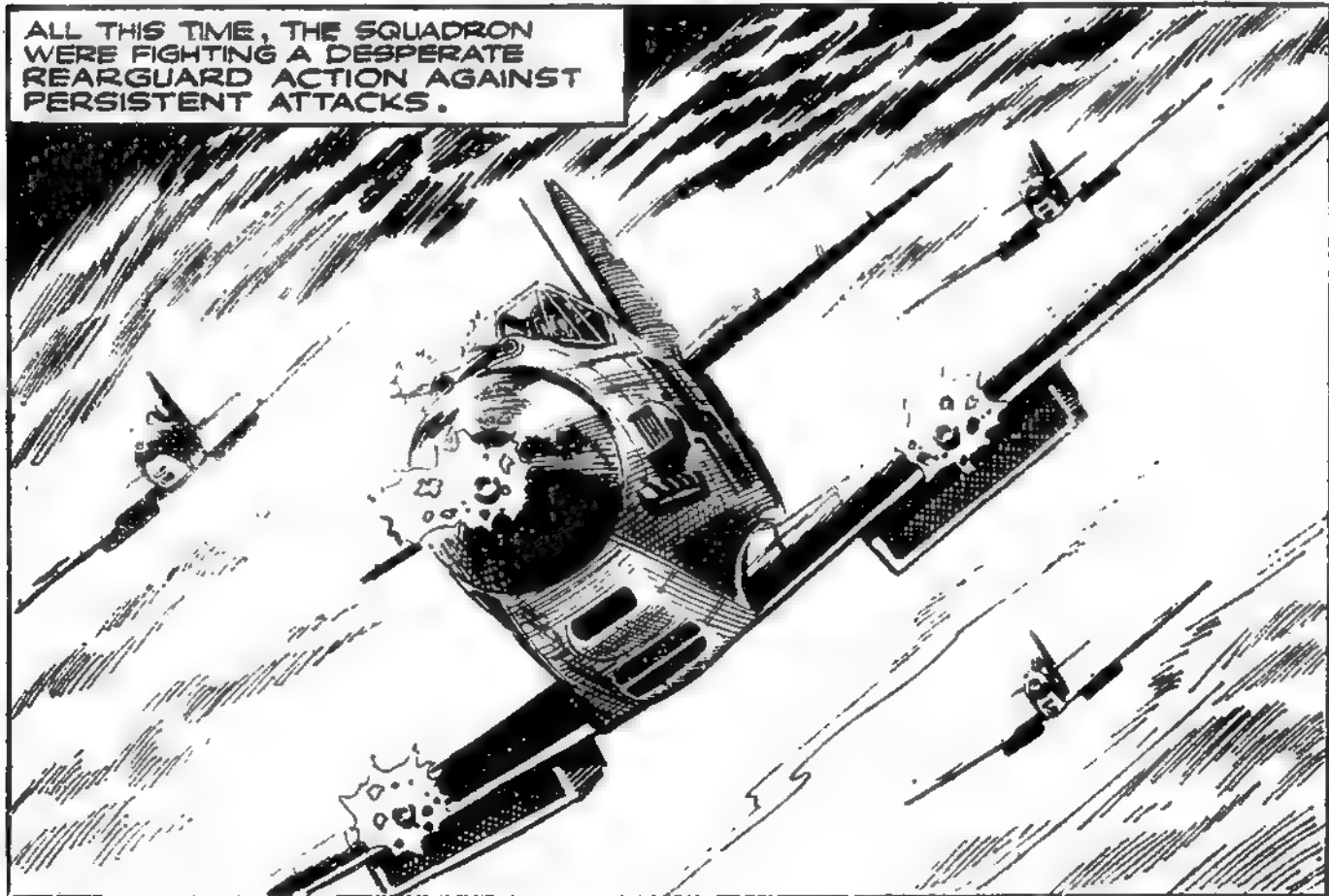


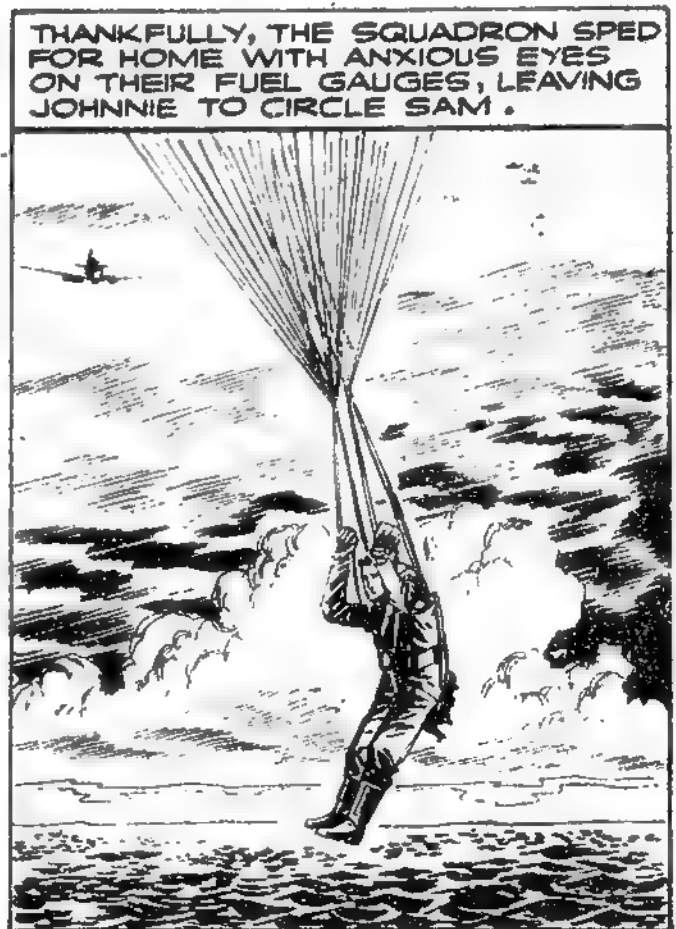
GASPING FOR AIR, SAM FLUNG OPEN THE HOOD TO ESCAPE THE CHOKING SMOKE. HE WAS NOW LOSING HEIGHT RAPIDLY.

I'VE HAD IT, I'LL HAVE TO BALE OUT!



ALL THIS TIME, THE SQUADRON WERE FIGHTING A DESPERATE REARGUARD ACTION AGAINST PERSISTENT ATTACKS.

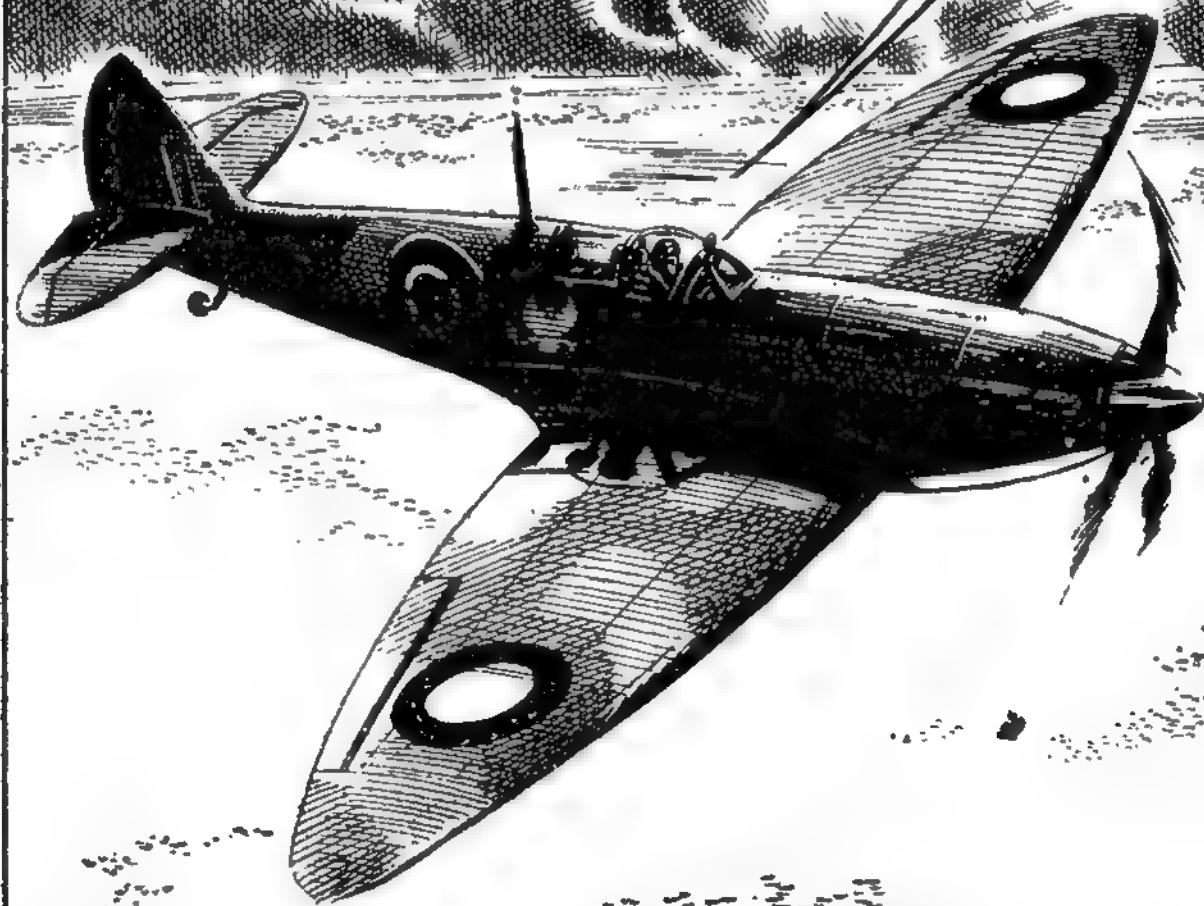




Chapter 5. CHEERS FOR JOHNNIE

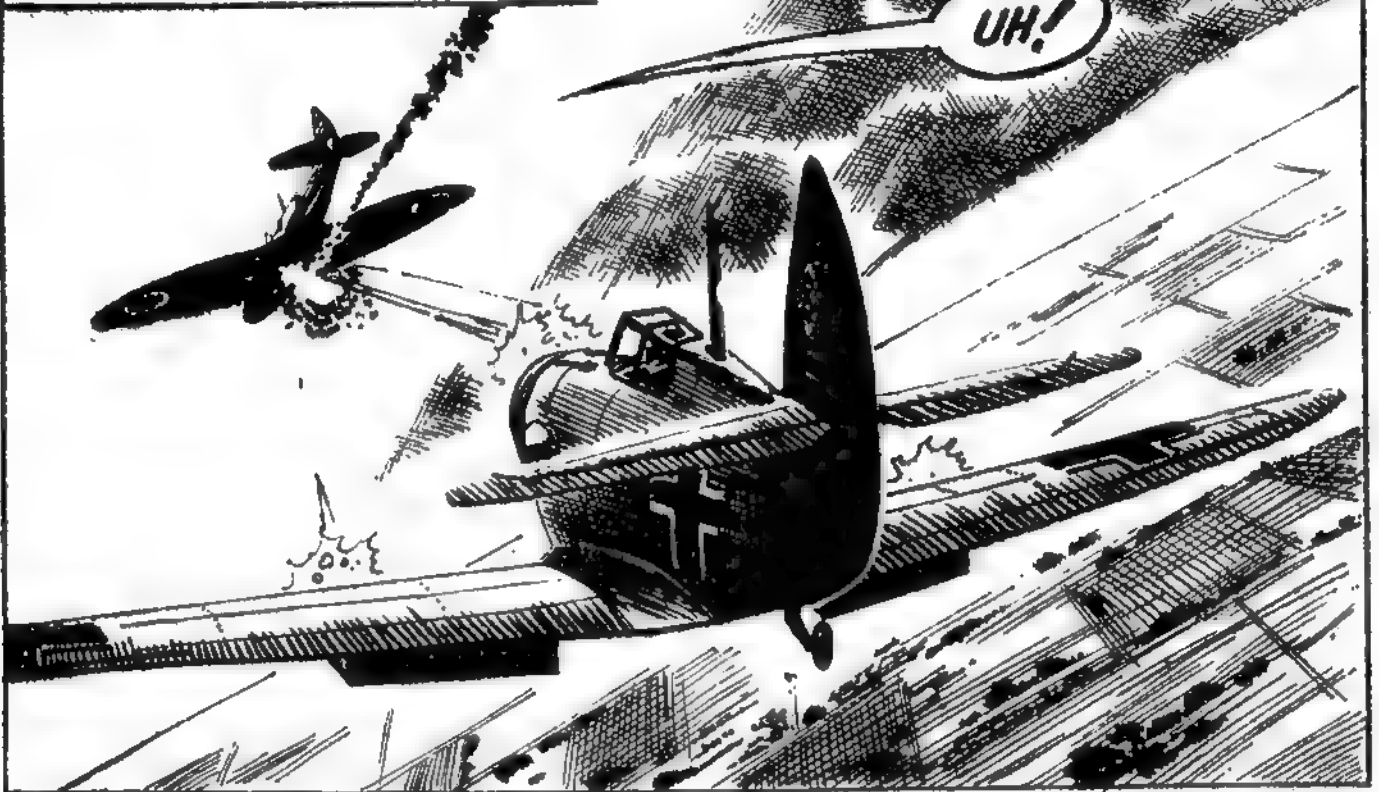
RELIEVED TO SEE SAM CLAMBER INTO HIS DINGHY, JOHNNIE CIRCLED OVERHEAD GIVING CONTROL THE DISTRESS CALL AND A "FIX".

MAYDAY!
MAYDAY! DOUGHBOY
LEADER HERE...
DOUGHBOY BLUE - ONE
BALED OUT ABOUT
FIVE MILES OFF
RYE. OVER!



JOHNNIE HAD JUST GOT HIS "FIX" ACKNOWLEDGED WHEN UP SNEAKED AN ENEMY FOR A FALTING BURST.

UH!



STUNG TO FURY, JOHNNIE TURNED TO ATTACK, BUT A SHARP GLANCE AT THE GLYCOL VAPOURS ESCAPING FROM HIS ENGINE TOLD A GRIM STORY.

DOUGHBOY LEADER HERE . . . I'M HIT . . . NOT A CHANCE . . .



WITH THE COOLING GLYCOL GONE THE MOTOR SOON BECAME RED-HOT AND CAUGHT FIRE . . .



JOHNNIE FOUGHT TO BALE OUT BUT HIS COCKPIT HOOD WAS JAMMED.



IN BRUTAL AGONY, JOHNNIE TORE AT THE STUBBORN CATCH. HE COULD SMELL HIS OWN CLOTHES BURNING AS THE HOOD BEGAN TO MOVE.



AT LAST, BUT TOO LATE FOR A SAFE DROP, JOHNNIE FOUGHT FREE AND JUMPED FOR HIS LIFE.



JOHNNIE PLUNGED HEAVILY INTO THE WATER FOR HIS PARACHUTE WAS ONLY HALF OPEN AND SCARCELY BROKE HIS FALL . . .



SAM HAD SEEN ALL THIS AND GROANED.



THANKS TO JOHNNIE'S SELFLESS ACTION AN AIR/SEA RESCUE LAUNCH WAS SOON PICKING SAM UP.



THEY SEARCHED TILL DARK WITH SAM ALMOST BESIDE HIMSELF WITH WORRY, BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF JOHNNIE.



BACK AT THE AIRFIELD THE BOYS FELT PRETTY LOW. CONTROL HAD PHONED TO TELL THEM OF SAM'S RESCUE - BUT THE SEARCH FOR JOHNNIE HAD BEEN FRUITLESS.

I GUESS JOHNNIE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR SAM.

YEAH - HE JUST STUCK WITH SAM - NO MATTER WHAT!



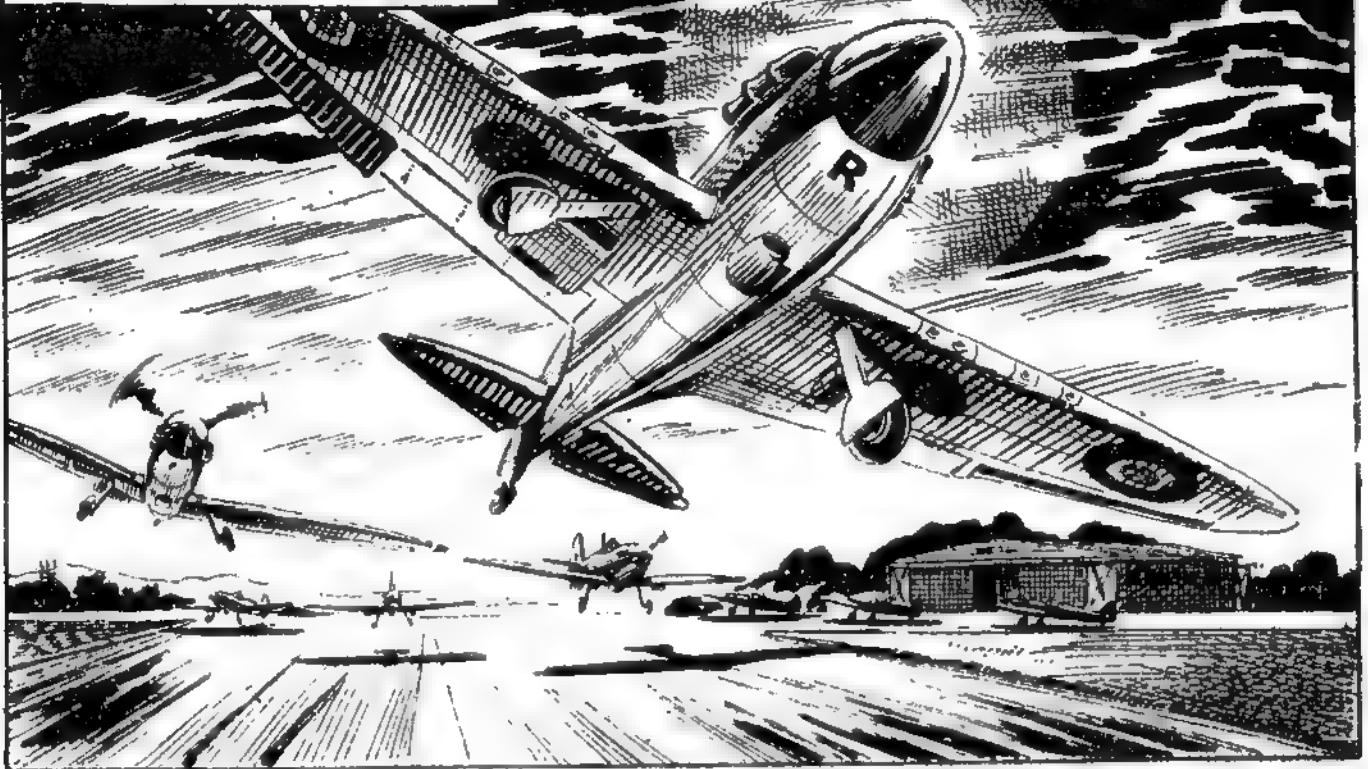
THAT NIGHT, SAM RANG FROM THE AIR/SEA RESCUE BASE ON THE COAST.

... LISTEN, BOB, I'M STAYING ON HERE AND GOING OUT WITH THE WALRUS AT FIRST LIGHT TO HAVE ANOTHER LOOK FOR JOHNNIE. FIX IT SO THAT THE SQUADRON CAN GIVE US FIGHTER COVER.

SURE THING, SAM!



SHARP AT FIRST LIGHT, THE SQUADRON TOOK OFF. LED BY BOB SCREIBER THERE WAS NOT A MAN WHO DID NOT MUTTER A PRAYER.



SUNRISE SAW THEM SWARMING ABOVE SAM'S WALRUS AS IT COMBED THE SULLEN WATERS.

EYES
PEELED,
EVERYBODY!

GOOD
OLD
WALRUS!

WE'RE
RIGHT WITH
YA, SAM
BOY!



INSIDE THE WALRUS, SAM SCANNED THE WAVES WITH A SET FACE. NOT EVEN A WAVING PAL COULD DISTRACT HIS EYES FROM THE VAST GREYNESS OF WATER.

WHERE
IN ALL THAT
WATER IS
JOHNNIE?



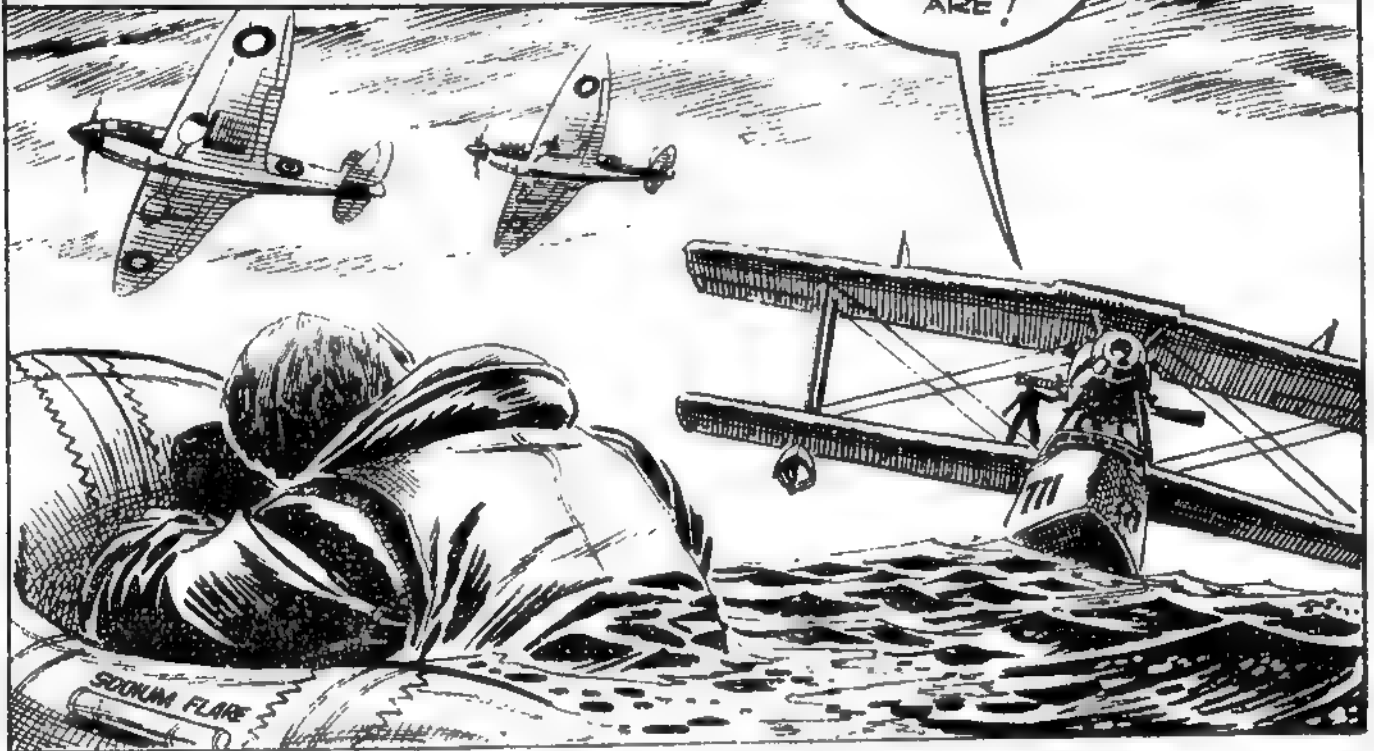
LONG MINUTES WENT BY,
THEN SUDDENLY . . .

THERE
HE IS! THERE'S
JOHNNIE!
QUICK!



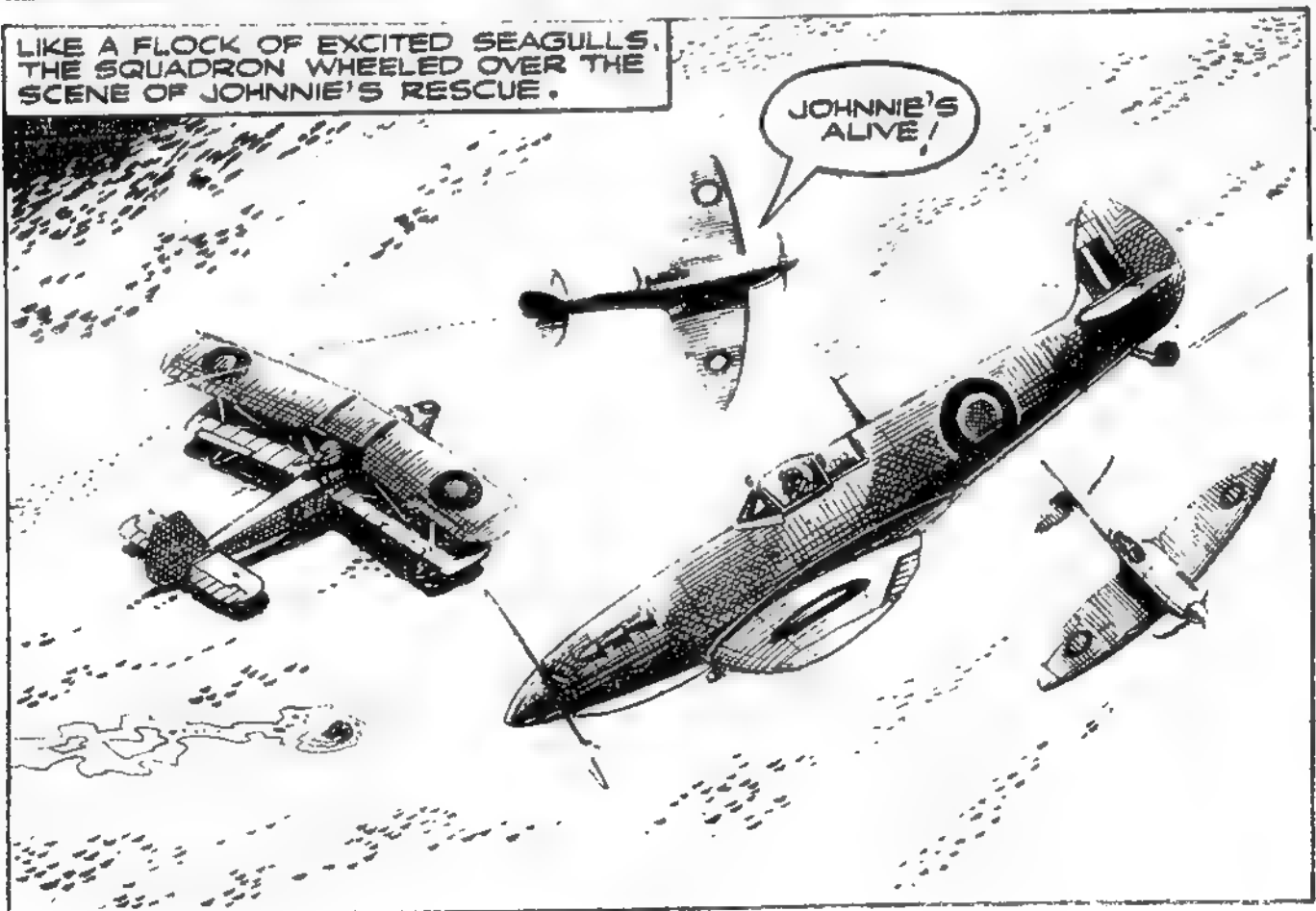
SUFFERING FROM HURT AND EXPOSURE, JOHNNIE HAD NOT THE STRENGTH TO CLIMB INTO HIS DINGHY AND HE HAD GONE THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT CLINGING TO THE DINGHY AND SUPPORTED BY HIS MAE WEST.

COMING, JOHNNIE! HERE WE ARE!



LIKE A FLOCK OF EXCITED SEAGULLS, THE SQUADRON WHEELED OVER THE SCENE OF JOHNNIE'S RESCUE.

JOHNNIE'S ALIVE!



SAM COULD NOT WAIT TO GET TO JOHNNIE.



DEATHLY CHILLED AND WEAK THOUGH HE WAS, JOHNNIE COULD STILL SMILE HIS THANKS.

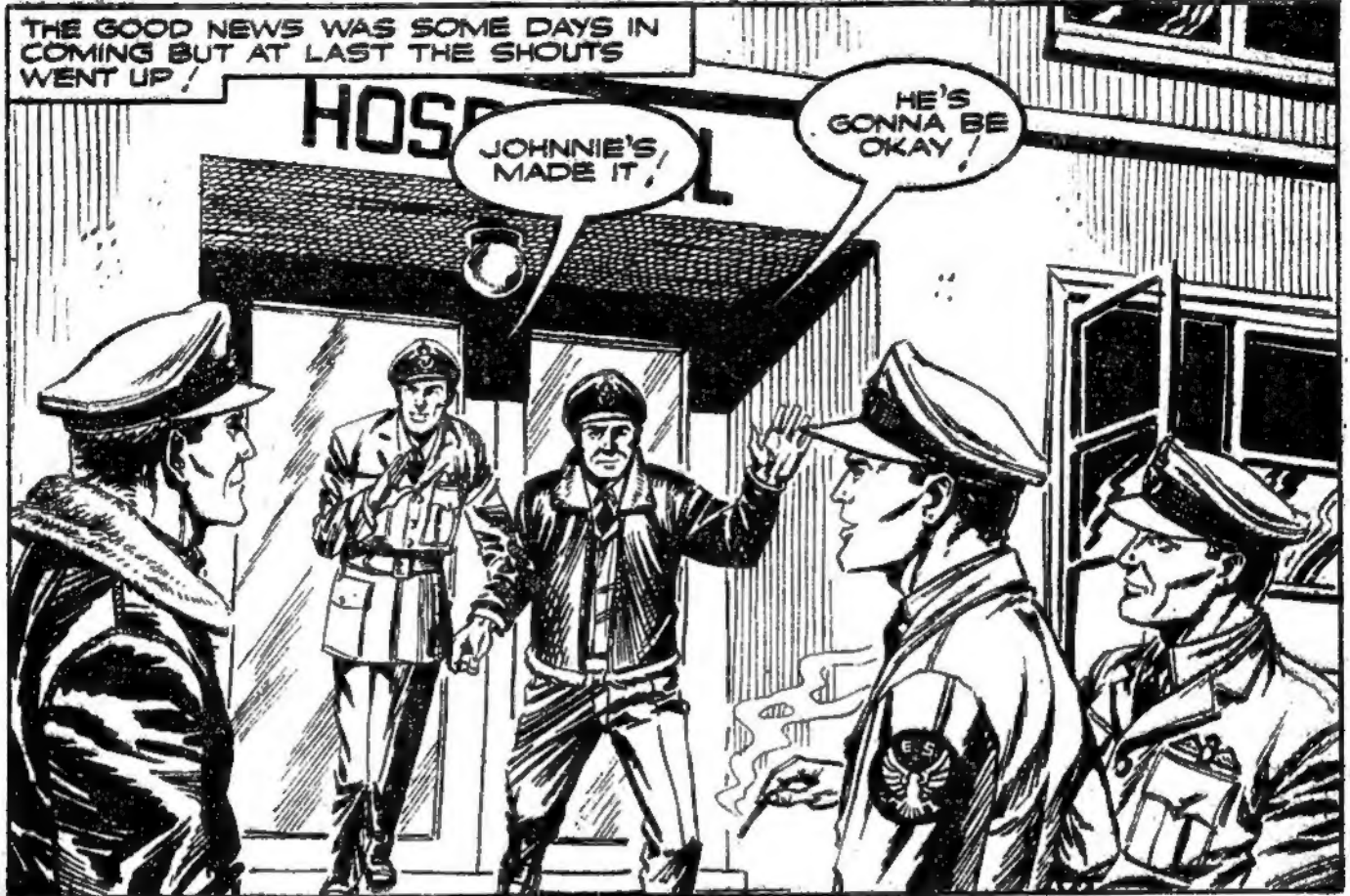
NICE GOING, SAM!

GOSH, JOHNNIE — YOU HAD THE BOYS WORRIED!



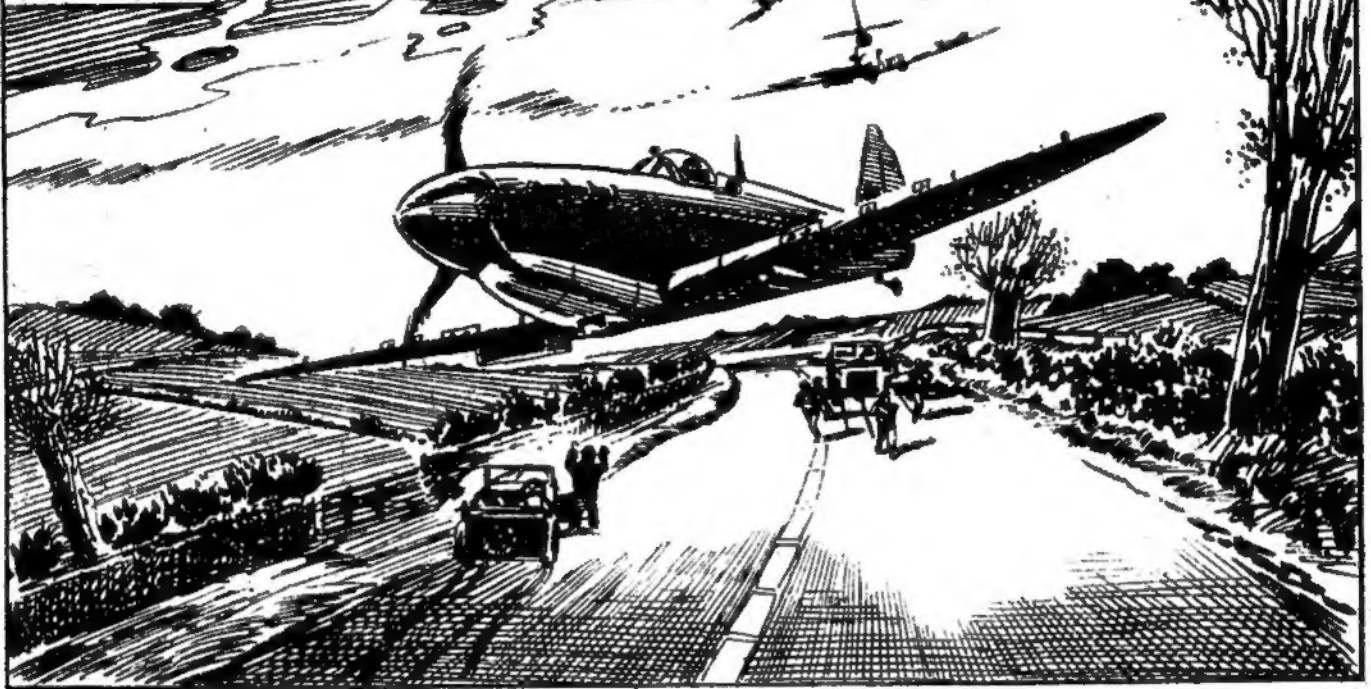
HOSPITAL. WHILE THE DOCTORS FOUGHT FOR JOHNNIE'S LIFE, THE BOYS SPENT ALL THEIR OFF-DUTY WAITING ANXIOUSLY FOR NEWS. JOHNNIE WAS NO LONGER JUST THEIR LEADER — HE WAS NOW 'THEIR' JOHNNIE.





Suicide Squadron

... WHILE OVERHEAD THE SECTION - AT-READINESS GAVE THE CORTEGE A ROYAL "BEAT UP".



BEST OF ALL THEY TOLD JOHNNIE, IN THEIR OWN WAY, HOW THEY FELT ABOUT HIM.

SURE ENOUGH - THERE'S A POWERFUL LOT MORE WAR AROUND WANTS TENDING TO!

YOU GOTTA COME BACK, JOHNNIE!

YESSIR!

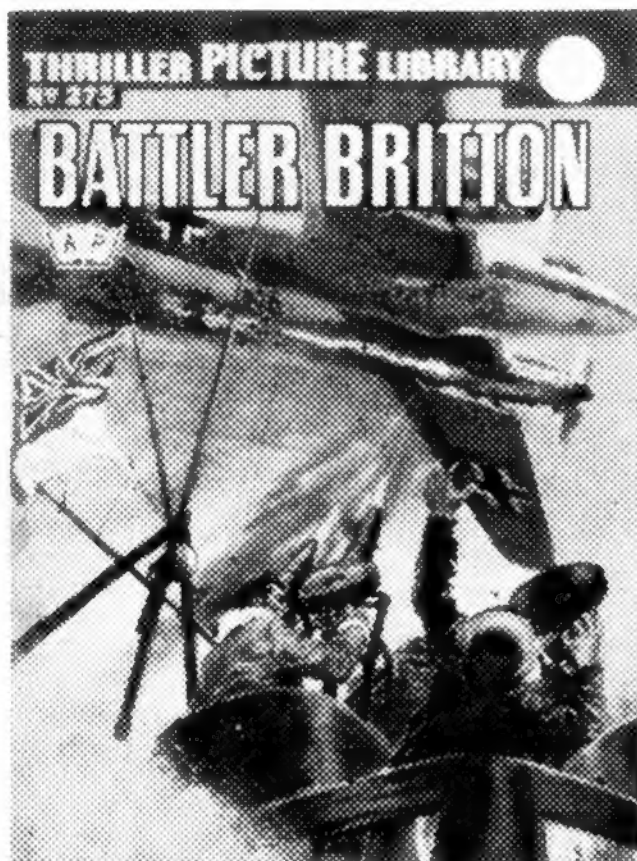
JUST TRY AND KEEP ME AWAY!



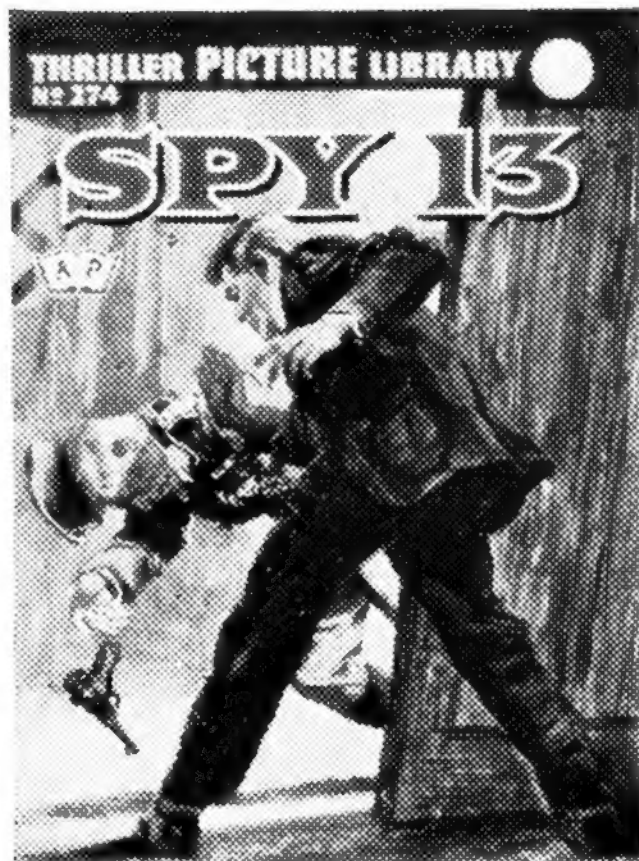
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